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AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1999
NUMBER 95

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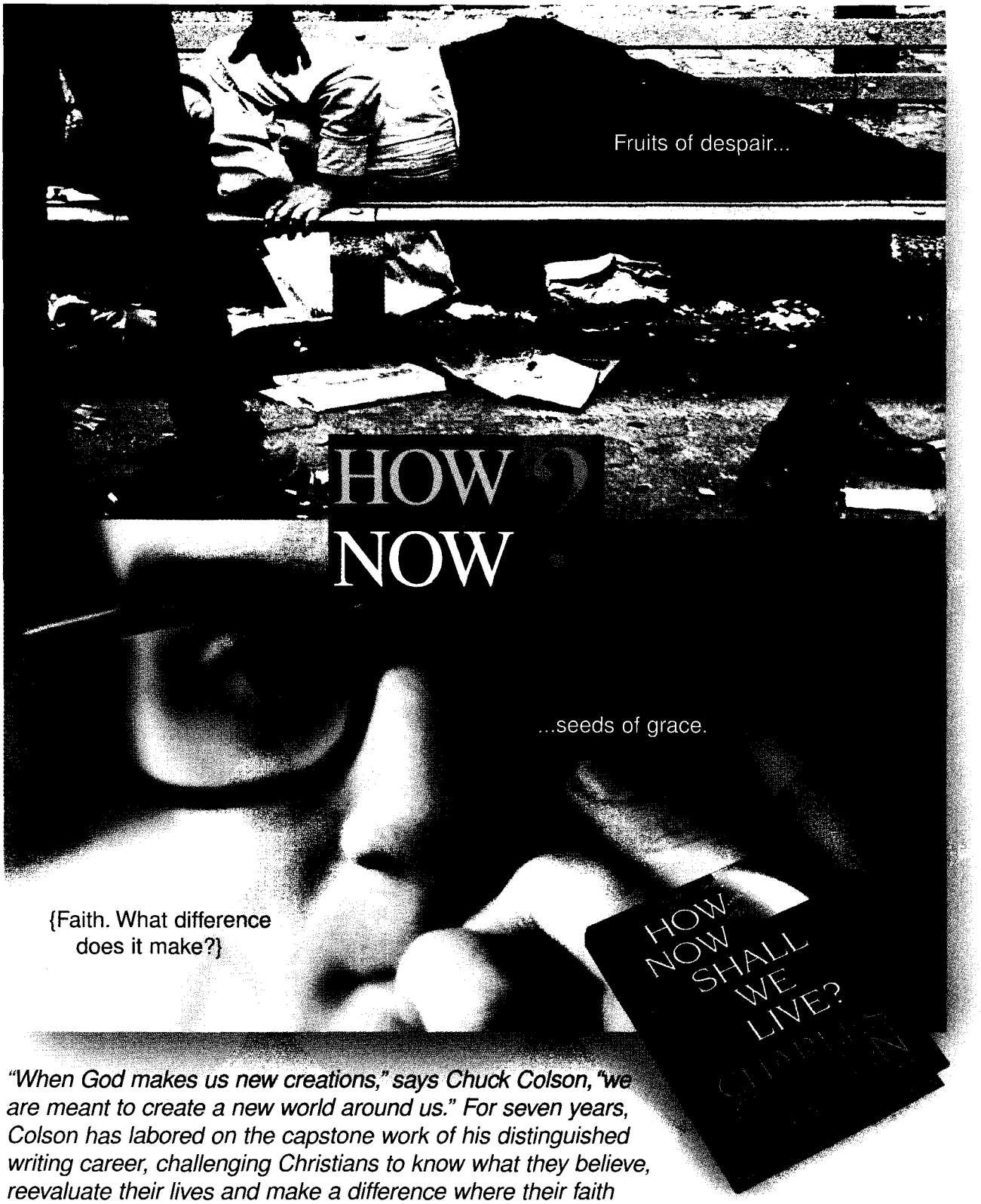

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Blindness on Birth Control?

There is so much openhearted sincerity in James Nuechterlein's "Catholics, Protestants, and Contraception" (April) that I feel moved to respond.

He writes, following J. Budziszewski, that natural law consists of those moral laws we "can't not know." I do not think this is a right way of conceiving it. It would be truer to say that it consists of those moral laws we *could* know and *ought* to know, but perhaps don't know, because of our obtuseness and lack of devotion.

According to Catholic understanding (my own was formed more by Newman than Aquinas), natural law is made up of moral principles that can be grasped without the aid of Divine Revelation. But it does not follow that these principles can be "readily" grasped by anyone. It is a commonplace of moral experience (and a key theme of Scripture) that certain truths cannot be found except by those who live upright lives. In fact, some moral truth is so precious—so high and so recondite—that it can be attained only after a lifetime of devoted pursuit and an exceptionally high degree of personal holiness.

Mr. Nuechterlein thinks it odd to suppose that "virtually all Protestants (and not a few Catholics) would have their moral faculties so corrupted" that they could be afflicted with blindness in this area. Why should that be so odd? Nothing is more typical of us fallen creatures than the failure to recognize the moral truth before our eyes, coupled with our stubborn refusal to abstain from what we desire unless its evil be incontrovertibly proved to us. Eve did not see what was wrong with eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It was centuries before the moral wrongness of slavery dawned on the Christian community. It is a rare teenager of today who sees anything wrong with fornication.

Were it not for God's grace and mercy, all of us would be completely blind to all moral truth. Were it not for our own sin, each of us would grasp a lot more than we do.

Kate van Schaijik
Haren, The Netherlands

In response to "Catholics, Protestants, and Contraception," I wonder how James Nuechterlein would explain the prohibition of contraception in the Protestant denominations prior to the 1930s. Did natural law change, or did Protestants become more "enlightened"? Only one church has remained constant in its teaching on contraception, and since natural law does not change, my confidence is in the Catholic Church. Simply because Mr. Nuechterlein and his wife never "felt" betrayed by contraception does not negate its inherent opposition to natural law.

Renee M. Wiesner
Aurora, IL

James Nuechterlein states that he and his wife used right reason in choosing contraception. At the outset of our marriage, my wife and I also chose the road most traveled, (non-abortifacient) contraception. After six months we decided to backtrack and take the road less traveled, natural family planning, and as in Robert Frost's poem, it has made all the difference. I know we are better people, a better couple, and a better family because of it. If we surrender to God's will, we change for the better.

In marriage, the Church talks about the two great goods of love and life that each act of sexual intimacy must respect and not act against. Would those who say that marriage should be open to life, but each individual intimate act does not have to be, say that a marriage should be open to love but each individual intimate act does

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not need to be?

Tom Edwards
Sandusky, OH

It is surprising to see James Nuechterlein persisting in and repeating the allegation that the opposition to contraception by the Catholic Church is based on natural law. He does of course insert a certain caveat—"at least as traditionally formulated." Nevertheless, he insists that natural law remains the basis of Catholic opposition to contraception.

Actually, the condemnation of contraception, while also using bona fide natural law arguments, is based primarily on the revelation of God in Scripture that men and women are created in the "image and likeness of God." God, who is love, created men and women to love as He loves. It is in this love that they reflect the image and likeness of God. The persons of God manifest their infinite, eternal, and mutual love by creation, an act of pure generosity. Men and women were endowed with the gift of procreation precisely so that they could thus manifest their love and truly act in the image and likeness of their God by joining with Him in the continuation of the generosity of creation.

To conform to God's love each and every conjugal act must, at least affectively, be open to procreation and certainly must never deliberately preclude procreation.

Grover T. Odenthal
Watkins Glen, NY

One might well have been tempted to let the symposium on *Humanae Vitae* (December 1998) pass without further comment, had not James Nuechterlein given in to the urge to probe it further, like a sore tooth, in his April column. His argumentation and attitude on the issue are typical of the contributions to the symposium critical of Catholic teaching on contraception.

One of the most disappointing aspects of the symposium was the general habit of those critical of Catholic teaching to fail to engage with the central element of the teaching. This central element is that an act of sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive is, in essence, a lie in which I treat myself or another as an object, and this is true each and every time I contracept. Not a single critical commentator, including Mr. Nuechterlein, actually addressed that argument with anything more than a dismissive you-can't-be-serious-it-doesn't-feel-that-way-to-me. This may be an honest description of one's emotive state, but it hardly constitutes an argument.

That anyone is surprised that we must take seriously each and every human action is itself a surprise. Imagine going into court and suggesting that, because I did not usually commit mail fraud, because the overall pattern of my life did not involve mail fraud, there was nothing wrong with this particular instance of mail fraud. I'd be in the hoosegow for the maximum before I could say "Judge Judy." If I do not take each and every human act I perform, especially those with such depth as sexual intercourse, with the same moral seriousness as I did the act before and the act following, then I have begun, to borrow Mr. Nuechterlein's phrase, to treat morality as a metaphor rather than as an expression of the truth about human persons.

It is unlikely that you will find any couples who have turned away from contraception who have not noted a marked improvement in their marriages, who are not grateful for the rediscovered respect for their physical integrity and the accompanying feeling of increased respect for one another. I am certain that our contracepting brethren do have a real measure of respect for one another, and intend no harm to each other. The fact is, though, they are using one another, there is less respect than there ought to be, there is some harm done—and this ought to stop. We are not called to lives that are decent enough; we are called to perfection.

Stephen J. Heaney
Department of Philosophy
University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, MN

I wish to briefly address James Nuechterlein's article "Catholics, Protestants, and Contraception" from the perspective of a clergyman and father of five who 1) is not Roman Catholic, and 2) strongly believes in the tenets set forth in *Humanae Vitae*. Mr. Nuechterlein is correct in suggesting that the issue of artificial contraception is not one that tends to engage Protestants. My contention is that it needs to be.

I am not aware of any major Protestant church that permitted contraception prior to 1930. The bishops of the Church of England (over the opposition of the Archbishop of Canterbury) approved the use of artificial contraceptives within the context of marriage; and the 1950s and '60s saw much of Protestant Christianity follow suit. It must be noted that Eastern Orthodoxy does not permit artificial contraception.

I believe an argument could be made that the prohibition of artificial contraception has been, until the twentieth century, an issue on which different branches of Christianity had achieved a remarkable consensus. Mr. Nuechterlein is correct in his assertion that this issue is currently a major impediment to Christian unity. I submit that historically this has not been the case —and thus question the moral justification for such a radical change in discipline.

(The Rev.) David Zampino
Church of the Blessed Sacrament
(Charismatic Episcopal)
Nashotah, WI

When James Nuechterlein notes with assurance that contraception never created a moral or emotional barrier between him and his wife, he seems to assume that any such barrier would be self-evident. However, the only sure way to know would be if the relationship could be lived twice: once with contraception, once without. Marriage is filled with opportunities to develop respect for and selflessness toward a spouse, uncontracepted sex being just one of them. Mr. Nuechterlein

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seems unwilling to consider that the mutual respect and selflessness of his marriage were achieved in spite of contraception.

His oddest statement is that "Many serious Protestants have by now read and pondered *Humanae Vitae*." I can't even bring myself to say "Many serious Catholics have by now read and pondered *Humanae Vitae*." Outside the seminary, it simply has not happened. I'm not sure it has happened inside the seminary.

Doug Tattershall
Lexington, KY

James Nuechterlein's "Catholics, Protestants, and Contraception" calls for a response.

J. Budziszewski's phrase to describe natural law truths as those "we can't not know" is not quite adequate. General principles of the natural law are readily known—e.g., murder and adultery are immoral. Invincible ignorance is impossible in such cases. But the natural law also contains remote conclusions that are known only after close and sometimes complex reasoning—e.g., mercy killing and artificial contraception are not permissible. The Author of natural law tolerates invincible ignorance in regard to these truths. Somehow the human race continues even if euthanasia and the practice of contraception become widespread.

If it is true, as Mr. Nuechterlein says, that "most conservative Protestants take natural law seriously, and see it as an essential element in maintaining public moral standards," one may ask what norm governs the personal morality of Protestants? Does Sacred Scripture alone provide for every moral ambiguity? Traditional morality claims that the natural law is a guide for our personal as well as our social activity.

Finally, is it correct to classify Catholics and Protestants alike as "orthodox Christians" as Mr. Nuechterlein does? Unfortunately, essential elements separate us, among which is the Catholic Church's teaching on artificial contraception.

We Catholics are totally committed to ecumenism. And, needless to say, we love our Protestant coreligionists dearly. But we also concur with the sentiments expressed by Aristotle in regard to his mentor: "I am a friend of Plato, but I am more a friend to truth."

Kenneth F. Slattery, C.M.
St. John's University
Jamaica, NY

James Nuechterlein seems quite correct in asserting that for the majority of orthodox Protestants birth control is a nonissue, and that the different perspectives Catholics and Protestants take on the issue reflect very different theological approaches.

A former evangelical myself, I can attest that I never gave birth control a second thought, nor did I ever hear it discussed by evangelicals other than in pragmatic terms (that is, comparisons of various types), the use itself being assumed. For the vast majority of pro-life Protestants, anti-contraceptive moralizing—such as the claim cited by Mr. Nuechterlein that a contracepting woman will feel "used"—does not resonate with their own experience, leading at best to bafflement and at worst to distaste.

It is only when contraception is understood as one element in a larger theology, rather than as an isolated "issue," that the reasons the Roman Catholic Church opposes it become comprehensible. Catholic teaching is integrated, and the teaching on contraception relates to its other components.

There is, for example, the "pro-woman/pro-couple" component. Abstaining from contraception and practicing Natural Family Planning (NFP) is nothing if not empowering to a woman: to know and work with her physiological cycle, rather than ignore it or treat it as an intrusion, is exhilarating, especially to those for whom such knowledge is completely new. "Why didn't they tell me about this in school?" was the question that recurred to me continually during NFP classes.

The classes were striking in another way: those present were all couples rather than individuals. The knowledge that NFP cannot be practiced alone but demands at all times the complete cooperation of both the man and the woman only reinforced the true nature of the marriage upon which my fiancé and I were about to embark. Catholics believe that sanctity is a seamless garment and that decisions about contraception thus cannot be isolated from the calls to solidarity, reverence for life, and respect for personal and familial dignity that all help compose the universal call to holiness.

While my decision to become Catholic originally had nothing to do with contraception—if anything, I viewed it as a potential nuisance—the actual attempt to practice NFP has opened up the integrity, beauty, and profundity of Catholic theology to me in a way that I can only describe as liberating.

Pamela Schwartz
Wheaton, IL

James Nuechterlein suggests that the Roman Catholic stricture against contraception is something that Protestants—contrary to the implied claim of *Humanae Vitae*—"*can* 'not know.'" Being Protestant myself (of the so-called "Radical Reformation" strain), I would like to submit a defense and clarification of the Roman Catholic claim.

My defense begins with the argument that Mr. Nuechterlein has misunderstood what it means to say that there are certain laws one "'can't not know.'" According to Aquinas (if I read him correctly), natural laws are known through the rational participation by humans in God's eternal law. That means that we must unpack two claims: What does it mean to say that there is an eternal law? And what does it mean to say that some of these eternal laws are known through rational participation?

I think the answer to the first question is something that the readers of this journal would agree

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on: the cosmos has a fundamental structure. To live in accordance with this structure—whether the law of gravity, the law by which a bird flies south for the winter, or the law against adultery—is to abide in the only order that can make existence meaningful.

The answer to the second question lies in understanding what makes the third law in the previous paragraph (against adultery) different from the first two laws. The law of gravity is discerned through empirical study of the universe, of what *is*. The law of flying south for the winter is discerned . . . we know not how. All *we* know is that the bird "knows it." As C. S. Lewis points out in *The Abolition of Man*, to say that the bird knows it "by instinct" is to say that we simply can't get inside the bird's head to know *how* it knows to fly south for the winter.

The law against adultery (and stealing, covetousness, dishonoring one's parents) is not like either of the previous two laws. Again borrowing from Lewis (*Mere Christianity*), moral laws are not known because they "automatically" happen (e.g., the law of gravity: Newton's apple *will* fall to the ground). They are known because they *ought* to happen, but very often do not. We know we ought not commit adultery, but often do so. And how do we know the "ought" in this case? We know it, not as a matter of empirical fact, nor by "instinct," but as we rationally reflect on the nature of life and action that brings the fullest measure of meaning, purpose, and spiritual vitality.

It does not take much study of the world's religious and philosophical traditions to recognize that there is near-universal agreement on these basic laws. For the Jewish and Christian traditions, those laws are enshrined in the second tablet of the Ten Commandments. Does it then follow that these laws have "always, everywhere" been known and recognized? Can we say that since some amoral primitive tribe practices cannibalism, that therefore the law against murder is not part of natural law? Not at all. It only means, quite precisely, that that tribe has not rationally and morally matured to the point to recognize that the law against murder is rationally necessary to a fully human society. In sum, just because natural law is something "we can't not know" doesn't contradict the possibility of development in natural law.

Now to the matter at hand: contraception. Let us begin where most readers of this journal agree: the promiscuous taking of an infant's life, for the sake of personal advantage, is immoral. That claim of natural law has itself developed. The Romans differed from the Carthaginians on the matter of child sacrifice (a nod to G. K. Chesterton, in *The Everlasting Man*). Yet Roman law allowed a father to expose an infant he did not want. The Roman position was a moral development on the Carthaginian position, but itself has been superseded. We now know that both positions are rationally contrary to the law of the Creator.

I submit the possibility that as we more fully and rationally reflect on the moral standards by which we make the case against abortion, the clearer it will become that most, if not all, forms of "artificial birth control" violate those same standards. That many Protestants fail to recognize that putative reality does not disprove it. It is attributable to the fact that the moral sensibility on which their practices are based developed prior to the full realization of the philosophical ([ir-] rational) underpinnings of the "abortion culture." Put in transcendentalist language, rejection of contraception (other than natural family planning) may very well be "the condition of the possibility" of the rejection of the abortion culture.

David Wayne Layman
Elizabethtown, PA

James Nuechterlein replies:
As with our December 1998 symposium on the subject, my column on contraception has brought a flood of mail. The letters printed above represent perhaps one-third of the total correspondence received. I have in addition received a number of personal letters and comments. The personal responses came overwhelmingly from Protestants and were overwhelmingly positive. The letters for publication came 95 percent from Catholics and were universally critical. The disparity in response indicates, once again, that on this issue a yawning gulf separates Protestants and Catholics (though polling data suggests that Catholics are clearly more divided on the subject than are Protestants). I suspect, therefore, that my responses to my critics will be no more persuasive to them than their original criticisms were to me. But, lest silence be taken for agreement, I respond, as briefly as possible, for the record.

Like several correspondents, Kate van Schaijik quarrels with my view of natural law. As indicated in my column, I recognize that we can be blinded to natural law principles, but again my point: why this particular blindness? Why is it that on contraception our sinful powers of rationalization take on such peculiar force? And does Ms. Schaijik really want to equate contraception with slavery or even fornication?

Renee M. Wiesner and David Zampino both note that Protestants, until well into this century, agreed with Catholics that contraception was wrong. That's a fair point, but it does not, in itself, resolve the issue. There have been other issues—usury, for example—on which the Christian church held to a position for a long time but later changed its mind. Should Rome have followed the Protestant lead on contraception in 1968, when Paul VI issued *Humanae Vitae*? There is no self-evidently right answer to that, but it is worth noting that a majority of the ethicists that the Pope consulted at the time recommended that the Church should at least modify its opposition.

Tom Edwards indicates that natural family planning has been a

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blessing to him and his wife, and I do not doubt that for a moment. The question is whether the rest of us are morally required to follow in the Edwards' footsteps. Like most Protestants, I remain to be persuaded. Mr. Edwards asks rhetorically, "Would those who say that marriage should be open to life, but each individual intimate act does not have to be, say that a marriage should be open to love but each individual intimate act does not need to be?" Of course not, and apples are not oranges. The act of love requires love: that's why it's called lovemaking.

Grover T. Odenthal says that Catholic opposition to contraception is based primarily not on natural law but on revelation. That's eminently debatable, I think, but I'm willing to grant the point for reasons of argument. Still, it seems to me a far reach indeed to read into the creation of humanity in the "image and likeness of God" the requirement that "each and every conjugal act must . . . be open to procreation." That is a not impossible inference, but it is hardly a necessary one.

Stephen J. Heaney criticizes critics of the Catholic position, myself included, for failing to make arguments that engage the "central element" of the Church's position, which is, he says, "that an act of sexual intercourse which is deliberately contraceptive is, in essence, a lie in which I treat myself or another as an object, and this is true each and every time I contracept." But if he will reread what he has written, he will see that it is itself not an argument but a declamatory statement, the truth of which needs to be demonstrated, not simply asserted. Similarly, his comparison of contraception with mail fraud does not hold. We all agree that mail fraud is always wrong; we do not so agree on contraception.

Doug Tattershall offers the interesting conjecture that even though my wife and I found that contraception did not create a barrier between us, we might have respected and cared for each other even more if we hadn't practiced contraception. Possibly so, of course—who could know, either way?—but I don't see that his thought experiment takes us very far toward deciding whether contraception is permissible. As for his questioning of my statement that "many serious Protestants have by now read and pondered *Humanae Vitae*," that all depends, to paraphrase our President, on what the meaning of "many" and "serious" is.

When I wrote that "most conservative Protestants . . . see [natural law] as an essential element in maintaining public moral standards," I did not mean, as Kenneth F. Slattery supposes, that they disregard natural law on issues of personal morality. This is a case of both/and, not either/or. Father Slattery goes on to suggest—if I read him right—that to qualify as "orthodox Christians" Protestants must accept every teaching of the Catholic Church. That would seem to set the ecumenical bar very high indeed.

I appreciate Pamela Schwartz's thoughtful and irenic letter. It is obvious that the practice of natural family planning has been a spiritual blessing to her and countless others. The point at issue is whether that admirable practice must be seen as the only licit method of regulating fertility.

Finally, I do not quite know what to make of David Wayne Layman's discursive argument. He offers a number of considered and plausible observations on the development of natural law—only to reach a most arbitrary and implausible conclusion. It simply is not the case that rejection of abortion requires, either in morality or logic, rejection of contraception. There *are* nonabortifacient methods of contraception. It is true that virtually all who oppose contraception oppose abortion as well. But the relation does not hold in reverse, and to suggest that it does or should seems to me to weaken the ecumenical argument against abortion without advancing the case against contraception.

Still Controversial

Michael Novak, in recounting the continuities and discontinuities of his intellectual journey ("Controversial Engagements," April), omits what may be the most crucial of his turnarounds: a realization late in life that contraception is intrinsically evil after all.

This illustrates the truth of Kierkegaard's remark about life: we live it forwards but understand it backwards. Hence the younger we are the wiser we would be to respect authority and tradition. Those Catholics who placed more trust in the traditional, authoritative teaching of the Church than in their own intellectual prowess found their faith rewarded. That is far from saying that the arguments against contraception were weak and inconclusive.

Still, Mr. Novak gives himself too little credit. He had been an outspoken opponent of the traditional condemnation of contraception, and a leader—complete with press conference—in opposing the encyclical that reaffirmed the tradition, *Humanae Vitae*. To tell the world he had been wrong on contraception took a lot more guts than abandoning a moribund socialism.

Patrick G. D. Riley
Wauwatosa, WI

I was distressed by Mr. Novak's article. I confess I am not privy to the subtleties of Mr. Novak's spiritual quest, but I am appalled that he sees fit to include capitalism as an enabling agent in the search for Christian fulfillment. Lost in his musings are the numerous papal warnings that highlight the predatory, degrading excesses of the capitalistic system. Capitalism, in its purest sense, is jungle economics. It is driven by a primordial vanity—the lust for profit. It is, at hard core, as materialistic as atheistic communism. When all the pieties are spent, it is just another methodology that defines and distributes goods and services.

There is no St. Paul or St. Fran-

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cis attendant to its beginnings nor a gentle Jesus to bless its fledgling entrepreneurs. It was bred by the Industrial Revolution, an implacably secular process that had as much to do with religious sensitivity as Freudian psychology does. Still, capitalism remains a marvelous beast, a superb engine to create material wealth, but unchecked and untamed it provides its own hells: the industrial slum, the bedlam, the poor house, the debtor's prison, and the dehumanization of urban populations who lived in disease and destitution amid enormous wealth.

Mr. Novak, in his attempt to sanctify capitalism, blinds himself to its beginnings and to the awesome wars waged in its defense and propagation. Nor does he view the "free market" for what it really is: a metaphysical horror, a random playground for the happy few, a construct of disorder that violates social justice and metes out recessions, bull markets, and hard times blindly and senselessly at the whim of greed. What Mr. Novak fails to understand is that modern capitalism is a half-breed, shot through and through with socialist palliatives, shaped and enriched by Christian concerns for the welfare of God's children, and given a human face despite its mantra that business is business.

Mr. Novak and the rest of us must see capitalism for what it is; like socialism, it is an economic system, secular, disembodied, immune to God's grace and dependent on men to flower into tyranny or freedom, into the city of Moloch or the city of God.

John McDonnell
Port Angeles, WA

Michael Novak says that some Catholics commit themselves to an "eschatological witness" (Thomas Merton, Dorothy Day), and some to an "incarnational witness." He favors the latter, and writes: "Those who choose the incarnational witness try to see in every moment of history, in every culture, and in every place and time the workings of divine grace, often in ways that are hidden like the workings of yeast buried in dough. And they lend their energies to altering that world in its basic institutions, even if ever so slightly, in the direction of *caritas*."

What about seeing "the workings of divine grace"? Certainly we "eschatologists" have also discerned God's actions in unexpected ways and places in history (e.g., in God's use of Assyria and Babylonia in the Old Testament) and in our times. We believe we have to note, however, that "incarnationalists" have historically tended to justify the status quo, to justify whatever is as God's will for humankind.

What about "altering the world in its basic institutions"? We would like to ask incarnationalists to reflect further with us on what we can all learn from the sixteen-plus centuries of the Constantinian era. We are deeply aware of a church history in which incarnationalists who were lending their energies to altering the world in its basic institutions typically tried to use those institutions to force their beliefs and practices on others and martyred our forebears.

Let us be very practical. Last summer the Presbyterian Church General Assembly made the front page of the *New York Times* and papers around the country when it asked all Presbyterians to remove handguns and assault weapons from their own homes and communities. The Presbyterians and other churches had asked for government restrictions on weapons for years. The big news last summer was that the Presbyterians were moving beyond lending their energies to altering the world in its basic institutions to modeling what they were asking the government to force others to do. Nothing wrong with encouraging governmental officials to maintain order, but there is something wrong with focusing energies on altering the world in its basic institutions when the Church is not actually marching to a different drummer and engaging in "eschatological" leading by example.

We are thankful there are Dorothy Day Catholics.

Albert J. Meyer
Goshen, IN

Michael Novak replies:
Patrick G. D. Riley is kind to note that I saved the discussion of my change of mind on contraception for another day. Still, perhaps I should note here that some of the articles in the December 1998 FIRST THINGS symposium articulated well the strictly philosophical dimensions of my difficulty with *Humanae Vitae* in 1969. The Pope was more accurate than I, however, in predicting the social consequences of contraceptive practices; I was too optimistic. Eventually, I learned from Karol Wojtyla to think more theologically about sexuality, a fuller and deeper perspective than philosophy alone proffers.

I recall taking the position in 1969 that the Pope had full authority to teach as he did in *Humanae Vitae*. (Perhaps, though, my memory is playing tricks on me. If so, I was even more at fault than I remember.) Nonetheless, having taken a public position to the contrary for some years, I felt an obligation to admit publicly that I was not then persuaded by the argument offered in that letter, and that this was the only point of Catholic teaching on which I found myself not in intellectual consent. Indeed, I thought that over time the papacy would slowly change its appreciation of the underlying evidence. Of course, the reverse happened: the papal position came to seem stronger, and mine weaker.

John McDonnell's current views of capitalism are not much more negative than those I used to repeat in public prior to about 1977, when I began to examine the empirical evidence more closely. Peter Berger's *Pyramids of Sacrifice* and later sociological studies helped me greatly. I have presented an account of these reevaluations in several books since that time, especially in *The Spirit of Democratic Capitalism* (1982). As Mr. McDonnell's multiple objections suggest, anticapitalism has as

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many heads as Hydra.

I really find it hard to believe with Albert Meyer that a position against gun ownership, defiantly paraded by Bill and Hillary Clinton and the entire breadth of liberal opinion makers, is countercultural. When Presbyterians take positions contrary to those championed by the hosts of the *Today Show*, I will suspect them of eschatological tendencies; not until then. Like Mr. Meyer, though, I am immensely grateful to "Dorothy Day Catholics"—Notre Dame's Father Michael Baxter, for example—even when I find their arguments more inspiring and invigorating than fully satisfying.

Schooling and Civic Involvement

I wish to respond to the article "Is Private Schooling Privatizing?" by Christian Smith and David Sikkink (April). When analyzing controversial social issues such as private schooling versus public schooling, it is helpful for researchers to consider claims made by proponents of each ideological camp and to refute such claims as can be refuted. This is precisely what Messrs. Smith and Sikkink do in their article. Their results indicate that private schooling families "are consistently more involved in all of the civic activities examined than are families with children in public schools."

However, it would be helpful to know the specific nature of these involvements in civic activities. A group of highly motivated and concerned parents who undertake the challenges of private schooling may be inherently more likely to get involved in civic activities that may be designed to lessen their challenges. If the respondents in the study were indeed involved in these civic activities largely as a means to improve or promote their private schooling initiative, then the survey may have a built-in bias. Parents of public-schooled children who are satisfied with public schooling may not be as inherently predisposed to such civic activities.

Before we can lay to rest the claim that private schooling leads to privatization, the possibility of such a built-in bias must be eradicated.

R. DeBacco
Greensburg, PA

Christian Smith and David Sikkink demonstrate that families who choose private and/or home schooling for their children are not likely to be isolating themselves from the rest of society. It is, however, a fallacy of division to conclude that because these families are not isolating themselves from society as a whole, they must, therefore, not be isolating themselves from particular individuals or groups of individuals within society.

In public schools, families are engaged in a civic activity with members of a broad group from within society. They are interacting with a fair representation of all particular members of society. When families choose private/home schooling, they may indeed continue to engage in supplemental civic activity; however, there is no guarantee that they will continue to be interacting with the particular population they would have had public school been chosen.

Jonathan A. Davenport
Wilmore, KY

Christian Smith replies:

Regarding bias: We have no good reason to believe that private and home schooling families are likely to be civically engaged primarily to "lessen the challenges" of private and home schooling. People's interests and commitments are much more complicated than that. Nor should we assume, for that matter, that public schoolers are actually satisfied with public schools, or that their civic activities are any less self-interested than those of private schoolers. In any case, we argue that even such "interested" involvements are crucial in activating people in ways that ultimately benefit civic life and democracy.

Regarding isolation: Jonathan A. Davenport's key assumption that public schoolers interact with a diverse group representing the larger society is a widespread myth lacking empirical support. Public schools assign students by geographic neighborhoods—which are highly segregated by class and race—and so reproduce the class and race divisions of the broader society (government attempts at integration notwithstanding). What family buys a house in a new area, for example, without asking the realtor where "the good schools" are? Furthermore, segregation happens *within* (seemingly diverse) schools. For example, research by University of Texas professor Jay Greene on who sits with whom in school lunchrooms suggests that private schools actually offer *more* racially integrated environments than do public schools. Finally, Mr. Davenport suggests that doing public school *itself* is a core civic activity, while voting, volunteering, community service, political involvement, and so on are mere "supplemental civic activities." The public school industry has indeed profoundly shaped our categories and consciousness.

How or Whether?

While I appreciate Richard John Neuhaus' concern for the authentic Catholicity of U.S. Catholic universities and colleges ("The Dying of the Academic Light," Public Square, April)—a concern which I share passionately—I find that he does less than justice to the article by J. Donald Monan and Edward A. Malloy in *America* and to the current and past responses of the colleges to the Apostolic Constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*.

We are all concerned about how, and not whether, the Apostolic Constitution will be applied. Since its promulgation in 1990 the Catholic campuses have been engaged in study, reflection, discussion, and (yes!) implementation of the wise and thorough philosophy of Catholic higher education embodied in that document. There has never been opposition to the Apostolic Constitution itself, neither to its whole philosophy of education and scholarship nor to its in-

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junction that the general norms enunciated be adapted to the varying contexts of universities of varying types in various geographical settings around the world.

What has been at issue is the particular formulation of the adaptation in the United States as elsewhere. (To date no norms have been accepted for any country or region.) There has been a process of drafting, critique, redrafting, explanations to and fro, negotiations over language, in which the colleges and the U.S. bishops have worked together amicably. At the heart of the process is the ad hoc National Conference of Catholic Bishops *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* Implementation Committee consisting of seven bishops, seven college presidents and, ex officio, four staff persons and three resource persons (of whom I am currently one). Through the mediation of this committee there has been extensive consultation at the initiative of the bishops with college presidents and the learned societies most immediately involved. The Monan-Malloy article refers to the current phase of that consultation; it does not pit the presidents against the bishops, because the subcommittee draft to which it refers is just that—a subcommittee draft offered for discussion and critique.

There have been some unhelpful and grotesquely sensational accounts in the press and media that have badly distorted public perception of the process of crafting an implementation proposal. Rome has not sent a proposal but asked for such a proposal to be made by each bishops' conference and submitted for Roman approval. A first attempt by canonists to draft such a proposal for U.S. implementation was rejected by the bishops after consultation in 1993. A second attempt submitted by the bishops' own implementation committee, which received enthusiastic endorsement from the presidents, was passed by the bishops in a vote of 224 to 6 in November 1996. This was sent back by the Congregation for Catholic Education in the summer of 1997, not by way of rejection but with the requirement to add to it more specifically juridical norms. The draft of the subcommittee is a proposal for this but awaits the implementation committee's process of consultation, collation of responses, and subsequent further work.

Under these circumstances it is not appropriate to describe argument over the subcommittee draft as opposition to "the bishops' provisions for implementing the 1990 constitution." Such a statement misrepresents the current status of the draft and of the consultation process.

Monika K. Hellwig
Executive Director
Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

RJN replies:
It is good to know that there is no opposition to the Apostolic Constitution "itself." By itself, however, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, while setting forth a compelling vision, doesn't *do* anything. Whether people agree or disagree with it is tested by their disposition to its implementation. The proposals toward that end developed by Anthony Cardinal Bevilacqua and others and to be considered by the bishops in November are not, I think, adequately described as merely a "subcommittee draft." A key provision in those proposals is that teachers of Catholic theology should obtain a mandate from ecclesiastical authority. It is both appropriate and accurate to note that the Monan-Malloy article opposes that and other aspects of the implementation plan proposed to the bishops.

In Defense of CCHD

In two places in his April 1999 While We're At It column, Richard John Neuhaus goes after the Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD). CCHD is the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) antipoverty campaign and is, as such, an integral and visionary part of the Gospel of Life that our Holy Father has called the Church to in *Evangelium Vitae*. CCHD's approach, to assist grassroots organizations that are seeking to overcome various root causes of poverty, is exactly the kind of work that addresses what the Holy Father repeatedly refers to as "structural sin." CCHD is widely recognized and praised by all kinds of antipoverty groups across this country. In performing its gospel service, CCHD also brings great credit to the U.S. Catholic Church in the eyes of many people throughout this country.

The barbs and insinuations thrown at CCHD are unworthy of FIRST THINGS, or at least unworthy of the mission FIRST THINGS sets for itself. To give the kind of status to Patrick Reilly of the Capital Research Center by saying that he has a "side" that should be heard in contrast to that of CCHD's chairman, Bishop Ricardo Ramirez, is analogous to saying that Catholics for a Free Choice's Frances Kissling has a "side" that should be heard in contrast to the NCCB's pro-life secretariat's chairman, William Cardinal Keeler.

As for CCHD's ethical guidelines, a new set has recently been approved, and I was a member of the committee that drafted them. The original guidelines, which served CCHD very well for close to thirty years, had been written by John Cardinal Krol. Objections to those guidelines should be taken up with him or his successor. The new guidelines, which, I may add, are excellent, have been drafted not to see "funding more tightly controlled," but to address issues that were not posed thirty years ago, including the morality of involvement in certain kinds of coalitions.

The Catholic Church continues to make common cause on some issues with organizations that it profoundly disagrees with on other issues. The Catholic Church has guidelines, and invokes those along with a healthy dose of the virtue of prudence in making judgments about such coalitions; so too with CCHD. CCHD does not support any organization whose mission contradicts the teaching of the

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Church. Since organizations sometimes change, it is occasionally necessary to withdraw funding from a particular organization. Every year CCHD funds hundreds of grassroots antipoverty organizations, and it is vigilant about not funding, or revoking funding to, any group that advocates positions contrary to Church teaching.

John Berkman
Department of Theology
Catholic University of America

RJN replies:
It greatly disserves the truth to compare Mr. Reilly with Ms. Kissling. The latter is a declared opponent of, and the former a firm adherent to, the Church's teaching. As I noted in my comment, Bishop Ramirez has not been responsive to inquiries about CCHD. On the ideological direction of CCHD, see the discussion of the influence of Saul Alinsky by Lawrence J. Engel in *Theological Studies* (FT, April). I hope the new guidelines that Dr. Berkman helped prepare will contribute to restoring badly battered confidence in CCHD.

Not a Bad Man, Not a Saint

As a Roman Catholic, I would like to express my support for the government of Israel's opposition to the proposed canonization of Pius XII (as reported in While We're At It, March).

Two issues need to be addressed in connection with this opposition. The first is whether it is right for Pius XII to be canonized, and the second is whether it is right for the State of Israel to oppose such a canonization. The second issue depends on the first. When a saint is canonized by the Church, he is officially claimed to have displayed heroic virtue. If Pius XII was culpable in failing to explicitly condemn the Holocaust, the Church, in canonizing him, will be proclaiming that heroic virtue is compatible with a grave offense against the Jews that was never repented of. (The grave offense, of course, is failing to condemn the Holocaust, not cooperating with it.) The State of Israel would be quite entitled to oppose such an event. If Pius XII's failure to explicitly condemn the Holocaust was not culpable, however, the State of Israel has no business opposing his canonization.

The culpability of Pius XII depends on the answer to the following question: "Did he, as supreme pastor of the Catholic Church, have an unconditional duty to publicly condemn the Holocaust?" It seems to me that this question, when posed, answers itself. Part of the duty of a pastor is to tell sinners that they must not sin. This duty is not confined to denunciations of sin in the abstract, but requires that particular sins, when serious and public, must be denounced. The Holocaust was one of the greatest crimes in human history, so the Pope, as supreme pastor of the Catholic Church, was undoubtedly obliged to condemn it explicitly. This obligation was not just towards the Jews, but also towards the people (many of them Catholic) who were committing the crime, and towards whom he had a pastoral duty. Since it was an obligation, the fact that Pius XII made many efforts to help persecuted Jews does not excuse his failure to live up to it.

Many Catholics have defended Pius XII by claiming that his refusal to condemn the Holocaust (we know that he was asked to do so) was prompted by a fear of reprisals against Jews that the Germans threatened to carry out if he made such a condemnation. Why the threat of reprisals would have carried any weight when the Germans were known to be bent upon the complete extermination of the Jewish people is not explained. But even if Pius XII was in fact influenced by threats of this nature, this would not excuse his failure to speak out against the Holocaust. Consequentialism and proportionalism are false; if a duty is unconditional, as Pius XII's was, there is nothing, even a warmhearted sentiment, that can excuse not fulfilling it.

This criticism of Pius XII should not be misunderstood. He was in a desperately difficult situation, he was an enemy of the Nazis, he made considerable efforts to help many Jews, and his failure to condemn the Holocaust does not necessarily mean that he was a bad man; in fact I do not think that he was a bad man. You can do bad things, when under great pressure, and still not be a bad man. But you cannot be a saint and do bad things, and the question at issue is not whether Pius XII was a bad man, but whether he was a saint.

The reaction of Catholics towards Jewish criticisms of Pius XII, and of the Church generally, is something that calls for self-examination. It usually consists of attempts to show that these criticisms are groundless or exaggerated, and that the Church wasn't that bad after all. The recent Vatican document on the history of relations between Catholics and Jews unfortunately succumbs to this self-excusing tendency in several places, most notably in its discussion of Pius XII and the Holocaust. The past of the Catholic Church is often unfairly and untruly criticized. But when it comes to the Jews, the Church really was that bad, and Catholics need to admit this and atone for it.

John Lamont
Queens College
Oxford, England

Corrections

• In the Briefly Noted section of the May issue, we credited the wrong publisher with reprinting Heinrich Rommen's *The Natural Law*. If you would like to order that book, please contact the actual publisher, Liberty Fund, at (800) 955-8335.

• In the June/July Public Square we recommended a fine new book called *A Celebration of the Thought of John Paul II*, just out from St. Louis University Press. Unfortunately the phone number we received from the publisher contained an error that we subsequently reprinted. If you would like to order a copy of this book, the correct phone number is (314) 977-2244.

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THIS TIME

London Diary

James Nuechterlein

A week in London at the end of May, and a number of things are not quite as expected.

Beginning with the weather. Five of the eight days are sunny and pleasantly warm, and only on the last day is there rain and heavy fog. My daughter, who has been living in the city since last fall and who acts as tour guide for my wife and me, assures us of our good fortune. "I haven't seen three sunny days in a row since I got here," she tells us.

Then there is the food, which, with the exception of the "full English breakfast" at our small hotel—including eggs fried hard as hockey pucks, sausage of dubious provenance, a sodden stewed tomato, and pallid baked beans—is excellent. Perhaps because of the English breakfast, we eat our evening meals in French, Italian, Spanish, and German restaurants. But lunch is mainly pub food—fish and chips, sausage and mash, sandwiches served on excellent bread—and it is both reasonably priced and flavorful. The taste is doubtless augmented by the wonderful Guinness stout to which I become devoted. (And the Brits are right about warm beer, some warm beer at least: Guinness served too cold, I discover, loses half its taste.)

There's also sports. Many Englishmen who come to America affect an air of bemused superiority over our presumably excessive emotional investment in sports events. But within a few days at the end of May Manchester United won the World Cup in soccer and the English national team lost out in an early round in the World Cup in cricket—and never have I seen such vicarious participation in the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.

Especially the latter. The *Times*, from which one would expect more restraint than the tabloids, could scarcely contain its bitter disappointment over the humiliation in cricket. "The English batsmen," one writer lamented, "mentally weak and technically incompetent, once again failed when the chips were down." Another, noting that a TV commentator had insisted that the British players compensated for their lack of talent by their hard work and tenacity, commented sardonically: "That will look good on their CVs come next season as they seek other employment." All in all, the *Times*' sportswriters seemed easily the equal of their New York counterparts in random nastiness.

Comparisons with New York spring to mind with great regularity in London. The cities are alike in their pace, density, and manic energy. (The English countryside may be tranquil, but London most assuredly is not. One senses the same excitement and ambition one does in Manhattan.) The streets are equally dirty—London has surprisingly few trash baskets—and the traffic equally impossible. London exceeds New York in panhandlers and street people; it is now where Manhattan was before Rudy Giuliani demonstrated that we need not put up with everything that urban liberalism imposes on us.

In both cities, tourists are everywhere, and London treats theirs rather better than New York does. Clerks and waiters are far more civil, people in general more polite. It's easy to change money. Tourist buses are immediately and ubiquitously available. Pedestrians are no less—perhaps even more—at risk of their lives, but at least in London most crosswalks have helpful signs telling people to look right or look left, a necessary instruction for those unused to English traffic patterns.

A day trip to Cambridge mingles splendor and unease. The colleges are wonderful, though we've hit the examination period and most of the courtyards are off-limits. The atmosphere of the city is enchanting—so much so, one has the sense of wandering in a particularly beguiling theme park. We watch the students punting on the Cam in idyllic languor under a golden late afternoon sun, and it is as though we had stumbled onto the set of a Merchant and Ivory film.

At the end of the day we go—everyone has said we must—to King's College Chapel for evensong. The chapel is as magnificent as advertised, and so is the choir. But the experience is disappointing. There is little in the way of congregational participation; we are observing a performance. Worse than that, the three hundred or so in attendance are not a congregation at all. They are tourists, and this is just another stop recommended in the guidebooks. Before the service, people fidget, whisper, and giggle. Many ostentatiously refuse to join in the prayers and responses.

After the service, large numbers, with few signs of reverence, hurry to the altar to take in—the guidebooks have emphasized this as part of the King's College Chapel experience—the Rubens *Adoration of the Magi* that serves as backdrop. It is a stunning painting, but not really an altar piece, and its presence further suggests that at the chapel, even at evensong, one is museum-going, not worshiping.

It is of course a cliché to identify the great cathedrals of England as museums of the Christian faith—or at least of the Anglican communion. Still, jostled by throngs touring Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's Cathedral, on the one hand, and recalling the dismal statistics related

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to church attendance, on the other, it is difficult not to do so. I find minor encouragement in returning to the Abbey for Sunday Eucharist. There are no tours on Sunday, and the ushers actively discourage anyone from attending the service in lieu of a tour. They emphasize that it will be a very long service (actually it's only a little over an hour) and that those who participate will be expected to stay to the end.

This seems to work. The members of the congregation—and this time, tourists or no, we are a congregation—take an active part in the service. The great majority attend communion, at which those presiding indicate deep reverence. Unlike at King's College, the aesthetic splendor of the choir is a contribution to worship, not a substitute for it. As the dean ascends the pulpit for the sermon, I brace myself—the result, no doubt, of listening to too many satires of Anglican sermons. But again we are in luck. It is Trinity Sunday, which makes it very difficult to avoid the subject of God altogether. It's not a great sermon—the dean suggests with an air of condescension that we not worry our heads overmuch with the particularities of Trinitarian theology—but he avoids heresy and only skirts triviality. To say I leave the Abbey enthralled would be too much, but at least I do not walk away dispirited.

On matters religious in England, the cliché about Anglican torpidity is balanced by that of evangelical enthusiasm. And I experience that, too, after a fashion. I awake from a nap on late Sunday afternoon to the sound of a hymn-sing from Glasgow on BBC 2. The hymns are familiar, though many I have not heard since childhood, and as the camera scans the large crowd I find myself moved by the evident faith on the singers' faces. I mention this to my wife, who has been watching the program from the beginning, and she suggests that I might have been less edified had I heard the hair-curling fundamentalist preaching that preceded the hymnfest.

The next morning, I wander over to Speakers Corner in Hyde Park, just a few minutes from our hotel. Instead of the radical political harangue I anticipate, I encounter more evangelical enthusiasm. The Corner has been taken over by a group called Christian Answer, and a tag-team of preachers proclaims the unvarnished gospel to an audience—mainly tourists again—that appears friendly enough, but not much in the mood for conversion. The preachers try hard, and the gospel comes through more clearly than in anything I've heard all week, but even with visual aids (it's a long time since I've seen a flannelgraph) the response is tepid. There are Christian Answer people scattered through the crowd, and they attempt, with little success, to engage people in personal witness. As one approaches me—"So what do you think?"—I nod uneasily and turn back toward the hotel.

Anecdotes are not evidence, and I draw no clear conclusions from my week's experiences of religion in England—except my wonderment, yet again, at the bewildering and quite incommensurable varieties of piety God has seen fit to make room for in his Church. We will need eternity to get it all sorted out. ☐

Glitter

At peak of day it starts,
Starlings chittering
Like bits of broken glass.

An autumnal chorale
In the crown of sycamore,
Whose trunk flakes white

Beneath the frangible song,
Whose yellowing leaves lap
And lave its glitter

Toward our ear, astonishing us
Amid grocery lists, dishes,
And mating socks,

Who in and out the doors
Of duty seldom pause
For such emissaries.

Mary Freeman

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Opinion

Who's Afraid of Tom Wolfe?

Mary Ann Glendon

Why does Tom Wolfe's latest book make the mandarins of taste so uncomfortable? John Updike took a good deal of space in the *New Yorker* to declare that *A Man in Full* was "entertainment, not literature." Norman Mailer in the *New York Review of Books* dismissed the novel as an "adroit commercial counterfeit." Martin Amis and others fell into line, all seemingly intent on assuring that no one took the book's position at the top of the best-seller list as evidence of literary merit. When Wolfe's work was passed over for last year's Pulitzer and other awards, J. Bottum noted in the *Weekly Standard* that "There's something about his sprawling brand of social realism that makes our literary professionals purse their lips in disapproval."

T. S. Eliot once told us that "Humankind cannot bear very much reality." Perhaps that's why so many literary professionals not only disapproved of but misread Wolfe's book. What, for example, is one to make of the capsule description of *A Man in Full* that ran week after week on the *New York Times* best-seller list: "Life in Atlanta on the cusp of the millennium, as Old South values collide with a new world." The Old South? Wolfe makes clear in his very first chapter that, for him, Atlanta is emblematic of American mobility. The self-made real estate tycoon Charlie Croker muses: "Atlanta had never been a true Old Southern city like Savannah or Charleston or Richmond, where wealth had originated with the land." Atlanta was "the offspring of the railroad business," a place where "people had been making money on the hustle ever since." *A Man in Full* is not about a collision of values. It's a portrait of a society where values other than sheer self-interest are difficult to discern.

Strangely, most reviewers (John Podhoretz was an exception) overlooked the extent to which *A Man in Full* is about masculinity. The book is densely populated with male characters from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds, each struggling in his way with the question of what it is to be a man in a world where masculine roles entrenched for centuries have all but disappeared. Women and children are very much in the background. For most of the men, sexual conquest and various forms of imitation warfare have immense importance; fatherhood barely figures among their preoccupations.

Another curious feature of the reviews is that nearly all of them take for granted that the book's "hero" is the flamboyant, aging Charlie Croker, who, when we meet him, is on the brink of a financial disaster precipitated by a foolish investment in a forty-story office building named after himself. Yet the action of the plot involves the convergence of Croker's journey through life with that of another protagonist, twenty-four-year-old Conrad Hensley, who has a menial job in a California frozen food warehouse owned by Charlie. When we meet Conrad, he too is on the brink of a fall—precipitated by his foolish, or at least imprudent, refusal to plead guilty to a crime he did not commit.

Conrad, like nearly half the members of his generation, spent much of his childhood without a father. His hippie parents openly disdained such bourgeois values as "order, moral rectitude, courtesy, cooperation, education, financial success, comfort, respectability, pride in one's offspring, and, above all, domestic tranquillity." The boy, for his part, dreamed of a more orderly life, a college education and a happy family. But the dream became difficult to realize when, at age eighteen, he married his pregnant girlfriend Jill and soon thereafter had a second child. Nevertheless, Conrad took a dangerous job so as to save for a condo, tried hard to be a good father to his bratty children, and, despite temptations, remained faithful to his nagging wife Jill. His progress toward these modest goals is interrupted when he is falsely accused of aggravated assault.

Things really take a turn for the worse when Conrad refuses the prosecutor's offer of probation in exchange for a guilty plea. He is convicted and sentenced to two years in prison. To his uncomprehending and infuriated wife, he tries to explain. "But I kept something, Jill. I kept my honor, and I didn't bargain away my soul. When the time comes I wanna be able to look Carl and Christy in the eye and say, I was innocent. I was falsely accused. I refused to compromise with a lie. I went into prison, but I went into prison a man, and I came out of prison a man."

It is far from clear, however, that Conrad will be able to emerge from the Santa Rita Correctional Facility with his manliness or anything else intact. Lying on his bunk in this terrifying place, Conrad lets his thoughts wander. "He had grown up associating religion with the self-delusion and aimlessness of adults. But now he thought about the soul, *his* soul. Or he tried to. But it was only a word! He didn't know how to give it any meaning! . . . And yet there was something . . . that caused him to care whether he lived or died and to worry about Jill and Carl and

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Christy. Perhaps that was his soul. Whatever it was it was not confined within his body and his mind."

Through a mix-up, Conrad receives an anthology of writings by Stoic philosophers instead of the thriller he was eagerly awaiting. In this strange tome, he finds passages that seem addressed directly to him. He is intrigued by Epictetus' idea of a divinity who gives mankind "a spark of his own fire." He tries to open himself up to this divine energy. "Having never believed in a god, and having never prayed before, he didn't even know that this was prayer."

Though Conrad finds much sustenance in the book, he is no Stoic. He becomes a more self-aware version of the same young man who risked death in the Croker warehouse to save his buddy Ken from the path of a careening forklift. In jail, Conrad invites deadly retaliation when he comforts a hapless newcomer who has been sodomized and beaten by members of the vicious gang that rules the cellblock. When he is delivered from that peril by an earthquake that destroys the prison (shades of St. Paul), Conrad puts his life in jeopardy yet again to extricate a cell mate from the rubble. He realizes that if he followed Epictetus' counsel, he would not get involved in the problems of others, but he doesn't feel able "to be that heartless."

Updike, one of the few reviewers to understand that the book in an important way was "all about religion," got the religion wrong. No Stoic ever taught that a man should lay down his life for his brother. Critical of the book as culminating "in renunciation and nonattachment," Updike completely lost sight of Conrad, who, at story's end, heads home to the wife and children he has never ceased to think about and love through all his wanderings. To Updike, the book's "most sympathetic" character is a forty-two-year-old African-American lawyer who over the course of the book gradually sheds his refined tastes, regular habits, and moral scruples. Is it possible that Updike simply cannot imagine a good family man as the hero of a novel?

For many reviewers, I suspect, Wolfe has penetrated American reality too deeply for comfort. His portrait of fin-de-siècle America is unsettling, in some ways reminiscent of Rome in the time of Nero and his Stoic tutor Seneca. There is more wealth and social mobility than in the Republic, especially for men who know how to seize the main chance. There is also more equality. Citizens of many different languages and origins mingle on an equal footing. And what liberty! Behavior formerly frowned upon is now tolerated. Marriage is easily terminated. Pleasures once reserved to the wealthy are now within the reach of persons of modest means. Games and spectacles abound. The poor are in a separate world, but kept from destitution by the dole. The affluent ape the speech, dress, and manners of the lower classes.

Artists, of course, are supposed to see more deeply than the rest of us. But that gift does not always earn our admiration. Wolfe forces us to contemplate what happens when a whole society begins to reject the habits and virtues that are necessary to sustain dignified life in a democratic polity (and what happens to writers who buy into the values of such a society).

It is said that *A Man in Full* has contributed to a revival of interest in the Stoics. How intriguing if that is indeed the case. In an increasingly chaotic Rome, the teachings of the Stoics offered people support in times of trial and lent dignity to the humblest life. But we know now that their philosophy of renunciation and nonattachment was a forerunner to a more complete answer to the question of what it is to be "a man in full."

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Back to the Future

Mark Gauvreau Judge

It's not often that one leaves a movie theater feeling speechless, but anyone on the right side of the culture wars who views the recent film *Blast from the Past* will find his jaw scraping the sidewalk—and not out of disgust. This little romantic comedy, coming straight out of lefty Hollywood, is a stunner not for its special effects or its acting, but because it is an unabashedly conservative film. It's also indicative of a larger cultural trend that should give heart to those who think American pop culture is irredeemably decadent.

Blast from the Past tells the story of Adam Webber, played with winsome innocence by Brendan Fraser (*George of the Jungle, The Mummy*). Adam is raised in a bomb shelter for the first thirty-five years of his life after his eccentric-inventor father (Christopher Walken) mistakes a plane crash for the big one during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. In a reversal of the Tarzan fable, Adam is sheltered from the wilds of the outside world and the cultural revolutions of the 1960s and '70s. He is taught ballroom dancing by mom (Sissy Spacek), boxing by dad, and impeccable manners by both. He learns Latin and French in the shelter's makeshift classroom.

Cut to the nineties. It's thirty-five years later, long enough for the half life of radiation to dissipate, and Adam's dad ventures to the surface to hunt for survivors. Here is where the film becomes remarkable. Rather than indulge in a predictable fish out of water tale wherein Adam and his parents are forced

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to encounter the modern world and are made better for their experience—à la last year's *Pleasantville*—the filmmakers have depicted modern liberal America as exactly what Adam's father says it is: a toxic purgatory. Emerging from the shelter, Mr. Webber encounters gun-brandishing gang bangers, New Age religious fanaticism, an adult book store where their house once stood, and a transvestite hooker. "It was horrible," Mr. Webber wails to his wife after beating a hasty retreat. "They can change their sex! They're mutants!"

Problem is, Adam is now a young man with desires. His parents decide to send him to the surface for supplies with orders to bring back a wife. Once up, Adam encounters Eve (okay, so this isn't *The Seventh Seal*). Eve (*Clueless*' Alicia Silverstone) is a thoroughly modern woman—promiscuous, terrified of commitment, and unwilling to settle for anyone who isn't a jerk. She rejects Adam, turned off by what she sees as his squareness and goofy, excessive politeness. Praying is "always a good idea," he beams. He's stunned to find out that "everyone's divorced," and tells Eve's roommate that "manners are a way of showing other people we respect them." He's delighted when he finds out one of Eve's friends is "gay"—"thank you for being happy all the time," he tells him.

Then Eve begins to see Adam through the eyes of the civility-starved modern world. His daily dance lessons from mom pay off big time when they go to a swing dance club and Adam wows two beautiful blonds with his footwork. While other men gawk at Eve's body parts, Adam compliments her eyes. It dawns on Eve that it isn't Adam who's abnormal, but the culture she lives in. "This street used to be little houses and gardens," her roommate notes as they search a grimy alley behind a porn shop for the entrance to Adam's bomb shelter. "Boy," Eve replies sarcastically, "we've come a long way." (As if you didn't know, Adam and Eve end up together.)

Twenty or even ten years ago, *Blast from the Past* would have been dismissed by liberal critics and pop culture watchers as reactionary. Yet in the last few years a new ethos has taken hold of the popular culture, or at least a small part of it, and its ascendance has changed the rules. Generations X and Y—those in their twenties and thirties and the "echo boom," teenage kids of baby boomer parents—are experiencing an almost fanatical appreciation and longing for "classic America," roughly the years 1920 to 1960. This movement's most obvious manifestation has been the explosion of swing dancing. Spawned by the 1996 film *Swingers* and reflected in a 1998 Gap clothing commercial, swing dancing has made a stunning comeback. Neo-swing bands like the Brian Setzer Orchestra, which just won two Grammies, are racking up gold and platinum sales, while all across the country, dance classes are full and clubs that formerly hosted rock and rap are converting to swing. I'm a Gen-Xer and swing dancer myself—I began just ahead of the boom, in 1995.

Writers in these pages have frequently observed that culture—that is to say what we eat, wear, watch, what we do for leisure and how we date and marry—is more important and affects us more deeply than the Dow Jones or who runs Congress. In this sense, the swing and retro-culture boom is more than a little significant. Surely some of it is nothing more than fashion-conscious nostalgia, but a close reading of the phenomenon reveals that swing is providing more to young people than long skirts and wingtips. A twenty-year-old named Katti Ehoff had this to say to a writer from *Smithsonian* magazine, whose March cover story was on the swing renaissance: "At ordinary nightclubs, if you dance with a man, he thinks you're going home with him. [At a ballroom] you'll touch thirty-five men in one night but it doesn't mean anything. You've come to dance." A young man at the same dance claimed that when he's dressed for a night of jitterbugging he finds himself opening doors for ladies.

Such apparently small things contribute to the winning of the culture war. In fact, many of the neo-swingers claim that they are advocates of a "movement" and a "lifestyle," not a fad. Their attitude is deeply countercultural, considering that the dominant youth culture is suffused with the anger and nihilism of punk rock and the rage and narcissism of rap. Simply by advocating nice dress, traditional gender roles, civility, talented musicians, romanticism, joy, and adulthood, swing is the first fad that has kids looking to grandparents for what's hip. Neo-swing is nothing less than a pop culture revolt against the youth cultures of the last forty years. And unlike those youth fads, this is a movement that can flower as its practitioners age.

Unsurprisingly, the swing wave has already touched off reaction in the rock culture. There have been blasts from *Rolling Stone*, but the most scalding indictment came this spring in the pages of the *Stranger*, a Seattle-based weekly paper: "What does it mean that [young Americans] are fetishizing a period before rock and roll, before women's liberation, before civil rights?" asks writer Juliette Guilbert.

The answer? That kids these days are women-hating racists who wish Donna Reed was their girlfriend and Amos 'n' Andy were still on TV. Guilbert equates the sharp-dressed Sinatra worshipers of the '90s to the blazer-and-tie neoconservative Buckleyites she avoided on her college campus in the 1980s: "They are all wearing suits, the same tyrannous outfits their fathers fought and bled and wore bell bottoms to get away from." In other words, the clothes make the culture: "Every level of our culture, from *Monday Night Football* to the *New Yorker* to people's choice of bathroom fixtures, reflects and inflects social structures and attitudes about things like—to

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cite the Big Three—race, class, and gender." And as such, the current nostalgia is deeply racist: when told by one martini-sipper that she liked the idea of "a time when we were all together," Guilbert snaps, "The 'we' of this rose-tinted '40s and '50s included returning soldiers, pinup girls, housewives, bandleaders, the Man in the Grey Flannel Suit, bobbysoxers, greasers—but not blacks."

Yet one thing that becomes clear after spending even one night on the dance floor is that these people are not racists; indeed, these kids positively adore black culture, almost to a fault. They worship original lindy-hopper Frankie Manning, still going at eighty-five, to say nothing of Ella Fitzgerald, Chick Webb, Duke Ellington, and other golden age swing heroes. A few neo-jitterbuggers have made it their personal mission to see that these artists get the honor today that racism made difficult while they were alive.

But this isn't good enough for Guilbert. OK, she writes, these people love black jazz, but only as represented by the mindless bounce of Dixieland and swing, the two earliest forms of jazz, and not the more esoteric and free-form bebop music of jazz giants like the late sax legend John Coltrane. "When John Coltrane gets left out of retro, it's not just because you can't dance to his music, but because he was a black intellectual, and intellectuals cannot be portrayed as instinct-driven darkies who let go of intellect. As has happened so often in the past, black culture is made into a simple-minded inoculation against the disturbing complexities of modern life. . . . It's a rebellion against the '60s." Astonishingly, Guilbert thinks the music of Duke Ellington and Louis Armstrong is not intellectual—as if the linear, Apollonian ride of a great swing chart is not as cerebral as the wilder Dionysian flights of bop. The real problem for rock and rollers who reject swing is that retro culture is striving not for a return to racism—the new dancers really are hooked on beats, which is why Coltrane doesn't grab them—but a retreat from the kind of overcooked self-consciousness and smugness championed by rock 'n' roll. If it wasn't always, rock has become in its own way oppressive, with MTV preaching never-ending rebellion. Rap stars insist on "keeping it real," which often means never losing the anger and illiteracy found on the street.

What swing says, in a nutshell, is that the kids are sick of anger and irony. Somewhere along the way we discovered they like dancing, dressing in nice clothes, and having rituals to gradually get to know the opposite sex. On a recent PBS special celebrating Duke Ellington, jazz trumpeter Wynton Marsalis noted that many old-time jazz musicians are coming up to him and delightedly asking, "Man, do you believe these kids are out here swingin'?"

You better believe it. This could be the start of something big.

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The Condescension of the Christian West

Adrian Karatnycky

The NATO-led war against Yugoslavia has had repercussions far beyond the bloody killing fields and battlefields of what was once the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. NATO's action has widened the chasm with most of the Orthodox Christian world. Although NATO has within its ranks one state with a predominantly Orthodox populace (Greece) and one that is predominantly Islamic (Turkey), it is dominated by countries with mostly Protestant and Catholic populations. Although actual religious practice varies widely throughout Europe, and all states have freedom of religion (with established churches a vestige at most), it is natural that NATO's actions appear to traditionally Orthodox countries as those of Western Christendom's secular authority.

Today, Orthodox Christians feel more distant from their Catholic and Protestant brethren in Western Europe and North America than at any time since the collapse of communism. With the exception of Orthodox Christian Albanians, who feel solidarity with their ethnic Kosovar kinsmen, virtually the entire Orthodox Christian world was unanimous in its opposition to the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia.

In Bulgaria and Ukraine, Orthodox Church leaders expressed dismay at NATO's decision not to suspend bombing during the Easter season. The Russian Church's leaders bitterly denounced NATO and a majority expressed indignation at the bombing campaign. Even Emil Constantinescu, the pro-NATO President of Orthodox Romania, called for a break in bombing for the Easter holy days. Greece's Orthodox Church leaders were vehement in their condemnation of NATO's "bombing of human life and the destruction of valuable treasures of the Kosovo Serbs' historic and Christian tradition."

The bombing led to a torrent of anti-Americanism, much of it fueled by ex-Communist and neo-Communist political parties seeking to exploit public anger at the West. Thus, the NATO campaign weak-

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ened the most pro-Western, pro-free market, and pro-democracy voices in countries undergoing fragile transitions toward liberal democratic rule.

This near-unanimous condemnation of the NATO bombing goes well beyond the traditional calls for peace and reconciliation that we expect of religious leaders. It reflects a radical difference in how the events in Kosovo and Serbia were perceived in the predominantly Catholic and Protestant NATO countries and in Orthodox Eastern Europe. It would be simplistic to say that Orthodox Christianity's different reading of the events was somehow less moral than ours, the product of some moral failing by Eastern Christians, or Orthodoxy's denigration or dehumanization of Islamic Albanian Kosovars.

Indeed, Patriarch Pavle, leader of Serbia's Orthodox Christians, had been a voice of opposition to Slobodan Milosevic and took part in pro-democracy demonstrations in the early 1990s. The Patriarch has consistently opposed Serb voices promoting ethnic enmity and supported opposition forces in their bid to have their election victories of 1996 recognized by Yugoslav authorities. He also has been eloquent in his denunciation of ethnic cleansing and violence against ethnic minorities in Yugoslavia.

Orthodox Christian views of Kosovo reflect Orthodoxy's encounter with the Islamic world. That front-line conflict with Islam emerged in Arab wars with Christian Byzantium in the seventh century. Since the fall of Constantinople in 1453, Eastern Europe's Orthodox Christian populations have spent centuries under Islamic dominion, particularly under the Ottomans.

The current struggle with Islamic Kosovo is seen by many in the region as only the latest phase in an irreconcilable conflict pitting Islam against Orthodox Christendom. And while the Orthodox are aware of ethnic cleansing and other atrocities committed by Serb forces, they know that Serb Christians have also been victims of ethnic cleansing and violence since the disintegration of Yugoslavia and they perceive the West's effort to resolve the Kosovo crisis as a manifestation of Western one-sidedness. They reject the efforts of NATO and the U.S. to portray the Serbian-Kosovar struggle in black-white terms because they are well aware that the Kosovo Liberation Army engaged in a campaign of terrorism at times directed at civilians, including Serb refugees. Just as significantly, Eastern Europe has been the battleground of numerous wars and of vicious totalitarianism under the Nazis and the Communists alike.

Apart from the Jews, the civilian populations of the Slavic countries suffered the highest proportion of civilian casualties in the Second World War. That suffering was matched by the heroic resistance against the Nazis by many Slavic peoples. These events, so recent in history, make the Orthodox countries suspicious of the efforts of those outside the region to settle problems by resorting to the use of overwhelming force that risks spinning out of control into neighboring states such as Macedonia. Their bitter experience of Nazism also justifies their assessment that, whatever he is, Slobodan Milosevic is no incipient Hitler bent on the extermination of entire peoples.

Contributing to the Orthodox world's dismay is the attitude of moral superiority displayed by the NATO-led West. The leaders of the Orthodox Christian states feel they were excluded from a meaningful role in the diplomatic initiatives that ended in impasse with Serbia and led to the bombing campaign. This omission reinforced a sense that NATO views the Orthodox Christian East as a politically and economically backward redoubt—the source of European instability—rather than a new democratic partner to be enlisted in the shaping of a post-Communist order in which ethnic hatreds have no place.

NATO and U.S. diplomats have acted as if public opinion is irrelevant in the newly democratic East European states. No vigorous public diplomacy was undertaken in advance of the bombing campaign to explain to the East European public the moral justification for NATO's action. NATO and American leaders were generally dismissive of the potential diplomatic role of the East European states. State Department spokesman James Rubin reflected the West's patronizing attitude when he asserted sarcastically in early May that "gun-toting Ukrainians" and other Slavs could not play a central role in a post-conflict peacekeeping effort.

The West's muddled and at times contradictory rationale for the military effort also contributed to confusion and anger in Eastern Europe. NATO stated that it intervened in response to "genocide" and ethnic cleansing. But it is clear that prior to the bombing "ethnic cleansing" was more the implementation of a harsh counterinsurgency campaign focused on rural centers of KLA activity. Widespread ethnic cleansing—an act of barbaric immorality—was implemented only after the NATO bombing campaign began. It is also clear that while NATO today likes to remind the world that Milosevic is a war criminal guilty of supporting earlier genocide in Bosnia and ethnic violence in Croatia, it is obvious to East Europeans that NATO not only has cut deals with Milosevic in the past, but is likely to do so in the future.

Such inconsistency undermines the West's moral legitimacy in the eyes of the East. Orthodox Christians, including Russians, Ukrainians, Bulgarians, and Serbs, see themselves as heirs to an ancient and rich ecclesiastical and cultural legacy. They therefore resent the efforts of what they see as younger civilizations, particularly the U.S., to serve as moral arbiters in their own backyard. This resentment has been skillfully exploited by the highly refined dema-

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goguery of Slobodan Milosevic, who is playing the cards of Orthodox and Slavic unity in a bid to bolster support for his disreputable regime.

A final factor influencing the response of Orthodox churches is their organizational foundation in nation-states. The Orthodox Christian belief in the equality and autonomy of the various national churches and patriarchates means that the various churches fashion their beliefs in the absence of supranational influences such as those represented by the Rome-based papacy at the apex of the Catholic Church. This makes the Orthodox churches more susceptible to national public opinion and to the pressure of national state leaders, a relationship that was accentuated under Communist rule.

It was a dispute between the papacy and Eastern Christian patriarchates over the question of whether Rome was to have primacy (as the Orthodox saw it) or supremacy over all Christendom (in the Catholic view) that led to a schism between East and West in 1054. The gulf between Eastern and Western Christendom deepened as a consequence of the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, which placed most Slavic Christendom under Islamic rule. More recently, the East-West divide in Christian civilization was artificially perpetuated as a consequence of Communist rule and the East-West political divide. In many countries in the East, Orthodox Christian clerics had been vetted by Communist authorities and forced to participate in the political propaganda of Marxist-Leninist regimes.

That changed dramatically in the late 1980s, and political ferment began to gather pace in the Communist bloc, often with the participation of religious leaders. Today, Orthodox Christendom is reentering the public square after a prolonged period of control by Communist leaders. The collapse of communism also has resulted in a religious revival in much of Eastern Europe, whose religious and moral energy can make important contributions to shaping the transition from Communist rule to democracy. A number of Orthodox Christian societies have held democratic elections (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine) and several have established an environment that respects the rule of law, private property, and basic human rights. This evolution has also created a citizenry that has established its attachment to liberal democratic values.

But the role of East European churches in this process—and in any durable process of rebuilding that will eventually come in Serbia and Kosovo—will not be strengthened if their voice and counsel are discounted or ignored by the political leaders of the West. It would be unfortunate if NATO's effort to establish supremacy over the Serbs leads to a new political schism between East and West.

What, then, can and should be done to bring together the Orthodox countries of Eastern Europe and the Western countries of NATO? One answer can be limned from the actions of Pope John Paul II, who has done more in the post-Cold War era than any leader to strengthen democratic values and promote the spread of democracy.

As part of the effort to contribute to a global spiritual renaissance, the Pope has made a concerted effort to bring about a reconciliation with Orthodox Christendom and in this way to bridge the divide that has separated these two wings of Christendom. As a Slav, and as someone who has lived in a society deformed by totalitarian domination, John Paul II has understood how solidarity and a sense of moral connection among people guided by the same moral and spiritual values is an essential component of the effort to spread the ideals of justice and equity.

The Pope has sought to span the breach that history created and the West's many missteps have widened. When he visited Romania in mid-May, he described his trip as "an important step along the road toward full unity." Such unity is an aim of both the Eastern and Western churches. But it should be an equally desirable aim of everyone in the West and the East committed to the idea of a community of democratic states and democratic values. As the West seeks to extricate itself from the Balkan morass, it would do well to recognize that progress toward justice in the Balkans will best be achieved by bridging the chasm that has developed between us and our natural allies in the East.

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Free to Die

Eric Chevlen

"Manslaughter, I could understand how they would arrive at that. But murder? This? They must have been an astonishingly cruel jury!" Jack Kevorkian told reporter Jack Lessenberry. "You tell them I said this," he went on. "I don't want to be a martyr. I want to be free. And that's why I am doing this, and you should print that. I need to be free to die."

Free to die. Curiously, when Franklin Roosevelt listed his four freedoms, the freedom to die somehow escaped his attention. But in Jack Kevorkian's cri de coeur, uttered on the threshold of the imprisonment that will likely prove to be—ah, the delicious irony! —a life sentence, he has revealed the secret passion that undergirds both his own warped career and that of the euthanasia movement itself.

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Kevorkian has spent his life in morbid fascination with death. Long before coming to public attention, he had earned the sobriquet "Dr. Death" from his colleagues in postgraduate hospital training for his habit of staring with an ophthalmoscope into the eyes of patients as they were dying. (At the moment that the heart stops beating, the blood in the easily visualized retinal arteries stops moving. Then, agonal spasms of the arteries divide the column of blood into segments often called boxcars, because the segments of blood move slowly along their track as the site of arterial spasm shifts along the artery.) In general, medical house staffs are fairly tolerant of morbid curiosity, and will justly attribute a few such observations to the needs of medical training. But they can recognize a voyeur when they see one.

Kevorkian's occasional forays into academic publication all reflect his abiding fascination with death. Typical of the lot is a 1985 article in which Kevorkian describes a variety of experiments that have been conducted on executed humans. In one particularly disquieting section, he speculates at length concerning how long consciousness may persist after beheading.

Even his artwork, painted with a surreal exactitude, is but one long *memento mori* (several examples of his artwork may be found at www.kevorkian.com). One representative piece, entitled "Nearer My God to Thee," shows a terrified naked man, digging his nails into the walls of a stark chamber in a vain effort to prevent his falling into the yawning abyss beneath him. Kevorkian's description of the painting may tell as much about his ideas as does the image itself:

> This depicts how most human beings feel about dying—at least about their own deaths. Despite the solace of hypocritical religiosity and its seductive promise of an afterlife of heavenly bliss. Most of us will do anything to thwart the inevitable victory of biological death. We contemplate and face it with great apprehension, profound fear, and terror. Sparing no financial or physical sacrifice, pleading wantonly and unashamedly, clutching any hope of salvation through medicine or prayer. How forbidding that dark abyss! How stupendous the yearning to dodge its gaping orifice. How inexorable the engulfment. Yet, below are the disintegrating hulks of those who have gone before; they have made the insensible transition and wonder what the fuss is all about. After all, how excruciating can nothingness be?

Kevorkian's fascination with death has not been limited to that of other people. (Many psychologists would argue, of course, that in fact the obsession is not about other people at all.) Suicide, not just assisted suicide, has been a recurrent theme of his speech, writing, and presumably thought for many years. Shortly before his conviction for the murder of Thomas Youk, Kevorkian reiterated his view that he saw himself involved in a mortal struggle. "Either they go or I go," said the aging defrocked physician. "If I'm acquitted, they go because they know they'll never convict me. If I am convicted, I will starve to death in prison. So I will go."

Michigan prison authorities recently revised their policies, and now will not force-feed an inmate who refuses to eat. Despite that, Kevorkian has not yet carried out his threat of suicide. Nonetheless, this threat has been repeated so often in recent years as to become the leitmotif of his raging twilight. It bears special consideration, for within it is the key to understanding the most notorious serial mercy killer in history.

It would be a mistake to think that Kevorkian's suicide by starvation in prison would be an act of martyrdom. A martyr, after all, chooses a worse fate in order to promote a cause that will live after him. For Kevorkian and other euthanasiasts, however, suicide is not the worse fate. It is living within the divinely ordained limits of human freedom that is the intolerable alternative. Just as rape is not about sex, so euthanasia is not about comforting the dying. It is about power. What is intolerable to the euthanasiast is not suffering or dying, but not having control over life and death. The essence of the movement is to defy our human limits and mortal destiny, not by avoiding death, since that is impossible, but by choosing its time and circumstance. "If I am not free to die," goes this logic, "then I am not free." Suicide for Kevorkian would be an act not of self-sacrifice but of self-aggrandizement.

Although his opponents have often lost sight of his purposes, Kevorkian himself has never veered from his target. Promotion of legalized euthanasia, just as his earlier promotion of vital organ transplants from condemned criminals, was never an end in itself. Rather, as he unabashedly described in his book *Prescription: Medicide*, legalized lethal human experimentation has ever been the cold star guiding his macabre life voyage. Even that, however, had a metaphysical subtext. Had science truly been the purpose of his ghoulish zealotry, then his ardor would have faded when no scientist stepped forward with an important scientific question that only such experiments could answer. No, the question gnawing at Kevorkian's faithless heart has always been a philosophical one. What is it that separates life from death? What is the vital essence, that immeasurable something that is here one minute, and gone the next, and with it gone all of subjective existence? He thought that by peering into the eye, or perhaps the brain, or perhaps the pituitary or anyone-but-God knows what, he might discover the awful secret of life and death. His career has been as tragic as that of the chemist who thought he could understand a love letter by performing an analysis of its ink.

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Now that he is at the close of his bizarre quest, Kevorkian realizes that the only lethal human experiment he will be able to perform is on himself. That, as much as the limits imposed by incarceration, explains his choice of starvation as a technique of suicide. The hunger would pass in a few days. After that, he could slowly drift toward death, and leisurely study the changes occurring within him as it approaches. Only starvation would give him the time to observe the changes both subjective and objective that occur at the border between life and death. Perhaps he longs for a final insight that will allow him to leave the world possessing a secret, if brief, triumphant knowledge that he alone could attain.

It is not lost on Kevorkian, of course, that his carrying out the threat of suicide by starvation in prison would make the state of Michigan an unwilling enabler in his scheme. He has never been able to see the moral distinctions among allowing someone to die, helping him kill himself, and administering the *coup de grâce* personally. How satisfying, then, it would be for him to force his nemesis, the legal authorities of the state he decries as "plutocratic and theocratic," to be apparent accomplices in his suicide. It would add another flourish of power to his final act.

Such is the twisted ruination of a life that has mistaken carbon monoxide for a pain-reliever and lethal injections for lovingkindness. Such can only be the result when mere men, whose origin is dust and destiny is dust, try to snatch the power that rightly belongs only to their Creator.

Perhaps it would have been different if Kevorkian had ever married and fathered children. Those who have known such love can more easily see an intrinsic worth in life that perdures despite ailment and disability. Even atheists can recognize a holy value in life when they gaze in love upon their children. Whether Kevorkian's deathly narcissism was the cause or the effect of his isolation we may never know. One can and should condemn a criminal who has arrogantly flouted the law and cold-bloodedly taken a life. But at some level one must feel tremendous pity for a man whose greatest love in life has been death itself. How utterly tragic. In his enduring fascination with death, Kevorkian has never really lived.

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Beachcombing

Suddenly, an awareness: I know, without
knowing how, that in the next minute I'll see

an aqua glint in the sand; the sea glass
sets my agenda. Or a flawless, oval pebble

shining wet at the lip of the tide rising.
Or a volute, its helix unfolding so perfectly

it must have been meant. Maybe a knot
of wood so cleanly itself, so tight in its bleached

whorl of grain, that it is hard to imagine it as
once being part of a tree. It might be

a rock that has held its secret fossil
one hundred thousand years for this moment,

its constant signal subliminal, a tone
humming its way along time to reach me with

a tingle in my skull, a premonition of its
sly ambush in the next few yards; the runnel

of my desire and the stream of God's will marrying
in a current so resolute it had to happen.

Luci Shaw

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The Idea of Moral Progress

Richard John Neuhaus

Almost everybody agrees that progress is a good thing. But most self-evidently good things, when examined more closely, have a way of generating disagreements. And so it is with the idea of progress, of which the idea of moral progress is part.

Thinkers arguing from the most diverse perspectives have agreed that no one thing is so characteristic, indeed constitutive, of modernity as the idea of progress. To be modern is to believe that history is "getting somewhere" in overcoming the problems and limitations of the human condition. Although muted among the secular-minded, there is also the implicit belief that getting somewhere means that history is going somewhere. Progress is more than change; it is change with a purpose. Change is the undeniable experience; the idea of progress is a way of explaining that experience. Change, it is observed, is the only thing that doesn't change. It might almost be said that change is the component of continuity that makes it possible to speak of "history" at all, and to speak of it as one thing. Without this happening and then that happening and then the other thing happening—in other words, without change—there would be no history. At the same time, it is said that history is necessarily contingent, which means that what happens does not happen necessarily. Such are among the conceptual oddities caught up in the idea of progress.

We are routinely told that ours is an age of unprecedented rapidity of change. In ethics and almost every other field, it is said that new questions require new answers. The same was likely said at the time about every age. One imagines Adam remarking to Eve as they are leaving the garden, "My dear, we are living in an age of transition." The modern assumption is that the transition is to something better. The modern sensibility unbounded is that of the neophiliac, the lover of the new. I noticed on a New York City bus an advertisement for a telecommunications company that bluntly proclaims the neophiliac creed: "Change is Good!" The unarticulated, and perhaps unconscious, assumption is that change is going somewhere; it has an end or what the Greeks called a *telos*. In the language of philosophers, change is teleological. Change is good because it is a move to the better on the way of history toward some unspecified, and perhaps unspecifiable, good. Such is the faith of modernity.

While sensible people have problems with the simplistic proposition that change is good, they have equal difficulty with the counter-proposition that change is bad. Leaning toward one proposition or the other marks the difference between dispositions usually called conservative and liberal—or, as some prefer, progressive. Even the most progressive, however, allow that there are setbacks in history, that time is not the vehicle of smoothly incremental progress. And the most determined conservative, while suspicious of change, will nonetheless allow that there are instances of undoubted progress. To the question of whether there is progress in history, a conservative friend, a distinguished social scientist, responds with what he thinks is a decisive answer: Up until about a hundred years ago, most people went through at least half of their lives with a toothache. In our society today, few people born after 1960 know what a toothache is.

Progress in medical care, while often exaggerated, is frequently cited as the most irrefutable evidence for faith in progress itself. Also cited, with considerable justice, is economic improvement. It is no little thing that the thirty million Americans who are today officially counted as living in "poverty" have, with relatively few exceptions, a standard of living

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that was considered "average" only twenty-five years ago. Moreover, there is hardly a product that we buy —from cars to razor blades to a bed mattress—that, controlling for inflation, is not cheaper and better today than twenty-five years ago. And that is not to mention the many products that were not available then. I was in Cuba a while back, and walking down one of the decaying streets of Havana I tried to place this puzzling sound—a persistent clacking noise coming from a government office. It was the sound of someone using a manual typewriter, an apt symbol of what progress has left behind.

Nor need we content ourselves with medical, economic, and technological evidence of historical advance. Is there not also a phenomenon that is rightly called moral progress? In the history of our own country, we have put slavery and legally imposed racial segregation behind us, and almost nobody doubts that this counts as moral progress. More ambiguously, there are the recent decades of changing sex roles and redefinitions of the family. The proponents of such changes express confidence that their recognition as progress is only a matter of time. Also in the realm of what we might call political morality, it would seem that we have learned from the catastrophes of the past. Outside the weekend militias, very few people today advocate a regime based upon the superiority of Aryan blood; and outside our universities, very few propose the state collectivization of private property. Moreover, it is surely great progress that, at least in the West, we do not kill one another in wars of religion. Whether this is because of a decline in religious commitment or because we have come to recognize that it is the will of God that we not kill one another over our disagreements about the will of God, it is undoubtedly a very good thing. I will be returning to the claim that all such instances of moral progress are a development or unfolding of received moral wisdom—wisdom that counts as knowledge.

But the immediate point is that those who adhere to the gospel of progress are not without considerable evidence to support their faith. Yet there is no denying that faith in progress is not so robust as it once was. Apart from corporate advertisers declaring that they are in various ways "making things better," full-throated boosterism of the gospel of progress is rare today. Perhaps the most quoted poem of our time is W. B. Yeats' 1921 reflection on "The Second Coming," in which he observes that "Things fall apart; the center cannot hold." The real or imagined prospect of impending ecological collapse and the all too real proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weaponry, among other things, cast a pall over the future, suggesting that, to paraphrase Eliot, the world may end with both a bang *and* a whimper.

The casting of the pall, in one telling of the story, goes back to the guns of August 1914, when it was said that the lights were going out all over the world. As a college student reading the memoirs of British philosopher Bertrand Russell, I recall being deeply impressed by his assertion that nobody who was not a child before 1914 could know what real happiness is. In his privileged and enlightened world, all good things then seemed possible, indeed inevitable. It was only a matter of time. Of the French Revolution, more than a century earlier, Wordsworth could exclaim, "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, / But to be young was very heaven!" Humankind seems much older now.

To be sure, in recent decades we witnessed a counterculture that, in a spasm of historical amnesia, had flower children announcing the Age of Aquarius to the tune of "the times they are a-changing." Grownups knew better, even if many felt obliged to indulge the youthful trashing of the world that they had made and that their children held in contempt. Yet those same children, now the middle-aged establishment in charge of almost everything, seem not to believe that the doctrine of historical progress has been vindicated. The Woodstock Nation was a youthful high, but it is now nostalgically remembered as a "time out" from the real world.

How can one seriously believe in progress at the end of what is undeniably the bloodiest century in history—the century of the Battle of the Somme, of Auschwitz, of the Gulag Archipelago, of Maoism, of obliteration bombing, and of mass starvation as government policy? In this century, so many people have been deliberately killed by other people that the estimates of historians vary by the tens of millions, and they end up by agreeing to split the difference or to round off the victim count at the nearest ten million. One might conclude that it has not been a good century for the idea of progress in general, and of moral progress in particular.

Shortly after World War I turned out the lights all over the world, Oswald Spengler published his two-volume *Der Untergang des Abendlandes,* known in English as *The Decline of the West.* Professional historians pilloried his scholarship, but many of the brightest and best of a generation suspected he was telling the truth, as they also succumbed to the mood of Eliot's *The Waste Land,* published in the same year as Spengler's second volume. A great depression and another world war later, after Henry Luce's "American Century" had been proclaimed and then debunked by Vietnam and all that, Robert Nisbet published, in 1980, his *History of the Idea of Progress.* Nisbet believed that, despite spasmodic eruptions of an ever more desperate optimism, the idea of progress was moribund or dead.

The idea of progress, Nisbet wrote, began with classical Greece and its fascination with knowledge, a fascination that was appropriated and put to intellectual and practical use by Christianity. From the

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early church fathers through the high Middle Ages and into the Puritan seventeenth century of Isaac Newton and Robert Boyle, there was a confidence that ever-expanding knowledge held the promise of something like a golden age. Although often in militantly secular form, this confidence drove also the Enlightenment, which was living off the capital of Christian faith in historical purpose. The assumed link between knowledge and progress explains what Nisbet describes as the liberal belief in "education" as the panacea for human problems, paving the road to utopia. But by the 1970s, said Nisbet, all the talk was about the limits of knowledge, the end of scientific inquiry, the unreliability of claims to objective truth. The curtain was falling on the long-running show of modernity and progress. What would come to be called "postmodernity" was waiting in the wings.

For many centuries, the argument was that knowledge equals progress, and now—or at least many were saying—advances in real knowledge were coming to an end. In 1978 an entire issue of the journal *Daedalus* was devoted to articles by scientists on "The Limits of Scientific Inquiry." Not only does science no longer have the cultural and even moral authority that it once enjoyed, the contributors noted, but many scientists are filled with doubts about their own enterprise. Some went so far as to suggest that we may be witnessing a reversal of roles between science and religion, with the ascendancy of the latter in providing a stable definition of our historical circumstance.

Some years earlier, the distinguished molecular biologist Gunther Stent published under the auspices of the American Museum of Natural History a widely read little book, *The Coming of the Golden Age: A View of the End of Progress.* There is irony in his reference to a "golden age," for what he discerned was a decline or *stasis* in almost every aspect of scientific, social, and artistic life. His critique is much more subtle than just another lament about growing license and decadence. He noted, for instance, that the progress of art in modernity has been accompanied by a freedom from accepted canons and limits, and that this freedom is undoing art itself. "The artist's accession to near-total freedom of expression now presents very great cognitive difficulties for the appreciation of his work. The absence of recognizable canons reduces his act of creation to near-randomness for the perceiver. In other words, artistic evolution along the one-way street to freedom embodies an element of self-limitation."

Stent noted that a similar sense of limits, of an end of progress, is evident in the so-called hard sciences, and in his own field of molecular biology. We may view such claims with a certain skepticism. When the Sumerians invented the wheel, there were perhaps those who observed that that was the end of progress. The French historian Charles Perrault wrote in 1687: "Our age is . . . arrived at the very summit of perfection. And since for some years the rate of progress has been much slower and appears almost insensible—as the days seem to cease lengthening when the summer solstice draws near—it is pleasant to think that there are probably not many things for which we need envy future generations." History's destination had been reached, he concluded, or was close at hand.

Gunther Stent, however, spoke not from such smug complacency but from a keen appreciation of scientific facts. He traces the various stages of the ascendancy of scientific progress in understanding ever more complex phenomena. We have now, he says, arrived at "the end of progress" because we have come up against the "mind-matter paradox." Stent asks, "Is it in fact likely that consciousness, the unique attribute of the brain that appears to endow its ensemble of atoms with self-awareness, will ever be explained?" He answers that question in the negative. He suggests that the search for a "molecular" explanation of consciousness is "a waste of time." "Thus, as far as consciousness is concerned, it is possible that the quest for its physical nature is bringing us to the limits of human understanding, in that the brain may not be capable, in the last analysis, of providing [an] explanation of itself."

Today, the connections between brain, mind, and consciousness is the subject of heated debate among scientists, philosophers, and theologians. One elementary problem may be put this way: The human brain would have to be a great deal more simple than it is in order for us to understand it; but if our brain were simple enough for us to understand it, our brain would be too simple to understand it. It is something of a quandary, and that quandary hardly begins to touch on the deeper questions about the relationship between brain, mind, and consciousness.

Similar limits are becoming evident in other sciences. To cite but one obvious instance, cosmologists who study the structure of space-time relationships in the universe note that the billions of light years between ourselves and the reception of the data that we can examine means that we never know what is happening *now* billions of light years away (or even what "now" means in this context). And the very logic of the circumstance means that it will not, it cannot, change in the future. Scientists a billion years from now, if we can imagine such a thing, will still be billions of light years away from the data accessible to their scrutiny. Even if, in ways that are not now imagined, we were able to leapfrog, so to speak, over vast spaces of time, there would always be beyond any point reached an infinity of points not reached. In other words, there is no end, and it is that realization that is at the heart of the idea of the end of progress.

I am not an astronomer or physicist or molecular biologist, but one cannot help but follow these dis-

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cussions with great interest. Of most particular interest to the theologian and philosopher is the discussion of the mind-matter connection that, especially in light of what physicists call the "anthropic principle," is richly suggestive for the biblical understanding of humanity created in the image and likeness of God—we are participants, if you will, in the consciousness of God. But exploring these questions here would take us too far afield. The question at hand is the idea of progress, and how that idea is now challenged not only by events in politics, society, and culture, but also by science, which, following its own rigorous methodology, discovers that there are many things we do not know and can never know. One may object that these limits are at the margins, that there are still vast fields of discovery open to future generations. But that is the way it is with limits; they are, by definition, always at the margin. They define the margins. The crucial point is that the link between knowledge and progress that was forged in classical Greece and that, in the form we call scientific, has been both the motor and the guarantor of the modernity project has now been broken. Or so we are told by some of the more impressive thinkers of our time.

But there was something else driving the idea of progress as well. Returning to Nisbet's rather melancholic book on the subject, his epilogue asks the question, "What is the future of the idea of progress in the West?" He continues, "Any answer to that question requires answer to a prior question: What is the future of Judeo-Christianity in the West?" He notes that the great thinkers of the Enlightenment—for instance, Lessing, Kant, Herder, and Priestley—all recognized that the idea of progress is "closely and deeply united with Christianity." The same is true of the enormously influential prophets of progress. "The mature writings of Saint-Simon and Comte, both preeminent in the history of the idea of progress, bear this out. Even Mill, apparent atheist through much of his life, came in his final years to declare the indispensability of Christianity to both progress and order." As for Karl Marx, it is by now a commonplace to observe that his grand ideological structure of the dialectic of history was but a heretical variation on Christian themes.

Although Nisbet's melancholy goes deep, he expresses the hope, perhaps a wan hope, that something like a religious awakening might yet rescue the idea of progress. He saw signs of such an awakening, and twenty years later many think those signs are stronger. Nisbet quotes Yeats: "Surely some revelation is at hand?" Maybe. Maybe not. He concludes the book with this: "Only, it seems evident from the historical record, in the context of a true culture in which the core is a deep and wide sense of the *sacred* are we likely to regain the vital conditions of progress itself and of faith in progress—past, present, and future."

Progress as dogma. Progress as faith. It sounds very much like a religion—the Religion of Progress. That progress has become a false religion, indeed an idol, has been the worry of a number of Christian and Jewish thinkers in the modern era. Few have expressed that concern with such incisiveness and prophetic passion as Reinhold Niebuhr. No American theologian since Niebuhr, who died in 1971, has had such a wide influence in our intellectual culture. A champion of what was called "neoorthodoxy," Niebuhr attacked precisely the link between Judeo-Christian religion and the idea of progress that Nisbet and many others have wanted to revive. In his 1939 Gifford Lectures, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Niebuhr noted: "The idea of progress is possible only upon the ground of a Christian culture. It is a secularized version of biblical apocalypse and of the Hebraic sense of a meaningful history, in contrast to the meaningless history of the Greeks."

Niebuhr did not intend that as a compliment to Christian culture. His point is that the idea of progress is a cultural distortion of authentic Christianity. A staunch Protestant writing in an era before the full flowering of ecumenical etiquette, Niebuhr blamed this distortion on what he called the "Catholic synthesis" of nature and grace as that synthesis was secularized in the Renaissance and then in subsequent modernity. The secularized idea of progress emerged from the biblical understanding of purpose in history, said Niebuhr, but it broke away from the biblical truth that the fulfillment of history transcends history itself, as it also jettisoned any notion of divine judgment. The secularized story of history therefore ended up with "no consciousness of the ambiguous and tragic elements in history." It is true, said Niebuhr, that human history is filled with endless possibilities, but the idea of progress forgets that they are endless possibilities for both good and evil. "History, therefore, has no solution of its own problem."

Niebuhr was accused of offering a bleak or pessimistic view of history. He called his view "Christian realism." If, without the idea of progress, people might despair of the tasks of personal, social, and scientific advance, that too, said Niebuhr, might be to the good. There is such a thing as "creative despair" that induces faith, he said, and such faith "becomes the wisdom which makes 'sense' out of a life and history which would otherwise remain senseless." What we should have learned from the last two hundred years, and especially from the tragedies of this century, is that history is not the answer to the question that is history. Niebuhr puts the point nicely: "We have learned, in other words, that history is not its own redeemer."

One may be unpersuaded by some of Niebuhr's conclusions, but a Niebuhrian sensibility is an invaluable safeguard against the shallow sentimen-

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talisms and utopian fantasies that have all too often afflicted thinking about history and its possibilities. Niebuhr rightly reminds us that history is not the uninterrupted triumphal march of progress. In the Christian view of things, experience both personal and social is cruciform; it is the way of the cross. At the same time, the cross is not the final word. There is resurrection, and it is both resurrection in history and resurrection of history. It is first the resurrection of the history of Jesus—and that is the foretaste, or preview, or promise of the resurrection of all things. That is surely the import of St. Paul's great cosmic hymns in, for instance, the first chapters of Ephesians and Colossians. To the Ephesians Paul writes, "For [God] has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (Ephesians 1:9-10).

This vision is inseparable from an emphatically Jewish understanding of the Messianic Age. The chief difference between Jews and Christians is over if, or in what way, that Messianic Age is anticipated in the person of Jesus whom Christians call the Christ. For both Christians and Jews, past and present time participate in what Paul calls "the fullness of time." In the call of Abraham, the election of Israel, the promises given through the prophets, and (for Christians) the coming of the Christ, the plan of history is being fulfilled. Jews disagree with Jews and Christians disagree with Christians over the eschatological scenarios and apocalyptic details by which "the fullness of time" will be achieved, but all are agreed that history is not, in the words of the cynic, just one damn thing after another; history will be fulfilled in the Kingdom of God. Niebuhr is undoubtedly right to say that "history is not its own redeemer." But the biblical view—a view that is utterly formative for Western culture in both its religious and secular expressions—is that history does have a Redeemer, and that the Redeemer is, however veiled and sometimes hidden, present and active in history itself.

And, ecumenical etiquette notwithstanding, it must be admitted that Niebuhr's very Protestant reading of history is in tension, if not in conflict, with the "Catholic synthesis." In our own time, that synthesis is energetically set forth by the pontificate of John Paul II. In October 1998, the Pope issued his thirteenth encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason), in which he powerfully affirms that there can be no conflict between faith and reason, between science and religion, between philosophy and revelation; all truths are one because God, the source and end of all truth, is one. Human beings are by nature seekers after truth, and revelation provides the ultimate "horizon" of that search. The Word of God, or the *logos* that is the ordering reason of all things, is incarnate in history and is the guarantee that the search for truth is not in vain. Not until the final End Time will we know the truth perfectly, but along the way both believers and unbelievers who honestly seek for the truth according to the rules of science and reason will be vindicated.

This is surely an audacious vision, but is it a doctrine of progress? The answer is no and yes. If by progress we mean a smooth, incremental, and almost automatic movement in time from worse to better, from ignorance to enlightenment, the answer is certainly no. If, however, by progress we mean that human beings are free agents who are capable of participating in the transcendent purpose that is immanent in history and holds the certain promise of vindicating all that is true, good, and beautiful, then the answer is certainly yes.

Moral progress may be a quite different matter, however. We have already noted the events of this century that have so brutally battered the idea of moral progress. We should at least be open to the possibility that we are today witnessing not moral progress but a dramatic moral regression. While, as we have seen, practitioners in the hard sciences express a new humility about the limits of their knowledge and control, many who work in the field of ethical theory and practice exhibit an unbounded hubris. For instance, Princeton University recently gave a distinguished chair in ethics to the Australian ethicist Peter Singer. Singer is famous, or infamous, for his championing of animal rights as equal or superior to human rights, and for his proposal, among other things, that there should be a trial period of one month after the birth of human babies in which those who are defective may be legally killed. Because of his advocacy of infanticide and eugenics, Singer has been denied platforms in German universities, where there is a more vivid historical memory of such arguments and their consequences.

As the decision of Princeton suggests, Singer is no marginal figure in our intellectual culture. He is also author of the main article on ethics, a full twenty pages, in the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica.* From Confucius and Aristotle, to Maimonides and Aquinas, through Hume and Kant to Peter Singer, the article traces the liberation of moral theory and practice from any truths that pose an obstacle to our will to power and control. The gist of it is caught in the title of Singer's 1995 book, *Rethinking Life and Death: The Collapse of Our Traditional Ethics* (St. Martin's). That Singer does not regret the collapse of what he dismissively refers to as traditional ethics is evident in the chilling conclusion of his *Britannica* article: "The culmination of such advances in human reproduction will be the mastery of genetic engineering. . . . Perhaps this will be the most challenging issue for twenty-first-century ethics." Singer leaves no doubt that he welcomes the challenge and the brave new world it portends. The cosmologists and molecular biologists—those who are

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bound by the disciplines of scientific method—reach the end of knowledge, at which point they fall silent in what might be viewed as a recognition of human creatureliness. Ethical theorists—bound by no such disciplines—reach the end of knowledge, at which point anything can be said, and anything can be done.

For a dramatically different account of the history of ethics and its progress or regress, we have Alasdair MacIntyre's much discussed and eminently readable little book, *After Virtue*—in my judgment, one of the most important books on moral philosophy published in this century. For MacIntyre, the account of moral theory and practice offered by people such as Singer, which is the dominant account in the academy today, results in a rationalized ethics that has broken loose from any tradition of virtue or truth—from our *knowledge* of virtue and truth. The stark choice facing us, MacIntyre says, is a choice between Aristotle or Nietzsche, between a tradition of virtue, on the one hand, and moral nihilism, on the other. The various intellectual dispositions that today run under the banner of "postmodernism" have quite consciously opted for nihilism. The hubris of Enlightenment rationalism that Niebuhr rightly criticized has given way to the hubris of postmodernity's irrationalism. Secular rationalism tried to do too much, but can rationally recognize when it fails. Irrationalism has no access to such humility.

In the view of MacIntyre and others, the Enlightenment project has failed on its own terms. Despite monumental efforts, perhaps the greatest of which is that of Immanuel Kant, it failed to produce an ethics to which any rational person, acting rationally, must give assent. Society was for a time able to live off the capital of earlier traditions of virtue, but now that capital has been depleted, the failure of the Enlightenment project has been widely advertised, and the time has come round at last for the triumph of nihilism. In this reading, postmodernity is the product of failed modernity, and the nihilistic avant garde is a regression to the rule of the barbarians. Barbarians today, as in classical Greece, are defined as those who are outside the civilizational circle of conversation about how we ought to order our life together, about the meaning of right and wrong, good and evil. They are those who know nothing, and insist that nothing can be known, about such matters.

Recall the concluding passage of *After Virtue*. MacIntyre draws the parallel between our time and the collapse of the Roman Empire when St. Benedict's monastic movement provided a refuge for civilization. "What matters [now] is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time, however, the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict."

We may think that picture somewhat overdrawn. After all, those who are called barbarians are not primitives, they are not neanderthals; they are frequently those thought to be the "brightest and best" among us. But that is to miss the point. The new barbarians are barbarians not because they are unsophisticated but precisely because of the hyper-sophistication with which they have removed themselves from what I have called the civilizational circle of moral conversation. In simpler terms, that is called "traditional values." The barbarians refuse to be limited by what we know, by the wisdom we have received, about good and evil, right and wrong. For them, the past is *merely* prelude.

What, then, can we say about the future of moral progress? Within the civilizational circle, there is moral progress (and regress!) in how we live, but there is no progress in the sense of moving beyond the moral truths that constitute the circle itself. We can develop the further implications of those truths, or we can step outside the circle by denying that there is such a thing as moral truth. It has become the mark of hyper-sophistication in our time to echo the question of Pontius Pilate, "What is truth?" Pontius Pilate, an urbane Roman ever so much more sophisticated by worldly standards than the prisoner who stood before him, was a forerunner of the barbarians now in power.

Those permanent truths are sometimes called natural law. In the Declaration of Independence they are called the laws of nature and nature's God. Or they are called the first principles of ethics. First principles are, by definition, always first. Moral analysis cannot go beyond or behind them any more than human consciousness can go beyond or behind human consciousness. Fifty years ago, C. S. Lewis, borrowing from Confucianism, called these first principles the Tao. In *The Abolition of Man*, he anticipated with great prescience today's debates in biomedical ethics about reproductive technologies, genetic engineering, and eugenic progress. The Tao, Lewis said, draws support from all religious and moral traditions in inculcating certain rules such as: general beneficence toward others, special beneficence toward one's own community, duties to parents and ancestors, duties to children and posterity, the laws of justice, honesty, mercy, and magnanimity. Whether drawn from the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, Chinese *Analects*, Cicero, or the *Bhagavad Gita*, these are the truths that constitute the civilizational circle.

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Like all tradition, the Tao is vulnerable. Those who want to violate it ask, "Why not?", and it is not always possible to give a rationally convincing answer, or an answer that is convincing to everybody. In response to the assertion of rules that set limits, the avant garde offers the challenge, "Sez who?", and the invoking of authority, even of the most venerable authority, carries little weight in our time. Most corrosive is what is called the hermeneutics of suspicion, in which every rule or law or custom is perceived to have behind it some hidden purpose, some power protecting its own interests. Thus the Tao is debunked, we "see through" its supposed authority, and the force of its commands and limits is "explained away." The result is what Peter Singer approvingly calls the collapse of traditional ethics. Lewis had a keen appreciation of what was happening in our intellectual culture. Recall again that remarkable passage from *The Abolition of Man*:

> But you cannot go on "explaining away" forever: you will find that you have explained explanation itself away. You cannot go on "seeing through" things forever. The whole point of seeing through something is to see something through it. It is good that the window should be transparent, because the street or garden beyond it is opaque. How if you saw through the garden too? It is no use trying to "see through" first principles. If you see through everything, then everything is transparent. But a wholly transparent world is an invisible world. To "see through" all things is the same as not to see.

To which many of our contemporaries say, "Precisely. To see through the first principles of ethics is to see nothing, which means to see that there is nothing except what *we will* to do; and, if there is nothing, all things are permitted." So speak the barbarians among us. Whether they rule us to the degree that MacIntyre suggests, I do not know. Whether they will rule us in the future depends upon our ability to argue—and to give public effect to the argument—that there is such a thing as moral *knowledge*. It is in the nature of knowledge that we can argue endlessly about what we know and how we know it. Or at least we can argue until, in the happy phrase of 1 Corinthians 13, we finally know even as we are known. Lewis' Tao provides one minimal foundation for such argument. My suspicion is that, while it is useful, it is too minimal; that a firmer and publicly effective understanding of natural law and first principles requires the specific acknowledgment of the God of Israel and the achievement of the Greeks, as these find expression in what is rightly called the Judeo-Christian moral tradition. That particularist tradition provides the most solid foundation for a truly universal ethic. But that is a discussion for another time.

The answer to the question of whether the barbarians will rule us in the future depends upon parents, religious leaders, educators, scientists, politicians, artists, and writers who are not embarrassed to give public expression to what they know about right and wrong, good and evil. The first proponents of the idea of progress, including moral progress, were right to believe that knowledge and progress are inseparable. There can be no progress *beyond* but only *within* the civilizational circle of the moral truths into which we were born, by which we are tested, and to which we are duty bound, in the hope of sustaining the circle for those who come after us. The alternative is the willed ignorance of nihilism. ☐

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Awakening at Littleton

J. Bottum

On April 20th, at around 11:30 in the morning, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold walked into Columbine High School in suburban Littleton, Colorado, armed with pipe bombs and at least seven guns. After killing a student on the lawn and another in the hallway, they moved to the library, where they murdered ten more of their classmates and a teacher before killing themselves.

Several students were shot simply because they were popular. Two were killed because they were athletes, and Isaiah Shoels was singled out because he was black. The seventeen-year-old Rachel Scott the boys killed apparently simply because she had a Bible, shooting her in the leg and taunting her to "Go be with Him now" before killing her. They mocked the eighteen-year-old Valeen Schnurr for believing in Christ, and when she tried to tell them that they would be able to stop killing if they too believed, they left her with permanent nerve damage from nine wounds. The seventeen-year-old Kacey Ruegsegger survived after being shot in the face and shoulder for being a believer.

And then at last they reached a bright-eyed seventeen-year-old named Cassie Bernall. Either Harris or Klebold (none of the cowering students could see which it was) put a gun to her head and asked, "Do you believe in God?" She paused for a second, according to her classmates. And then she answered, "Yes." "She was scared, but she sounded strong," said her Bible-study friend Joshua Lapp, a sophomore who was hiding nearby, "like she knew what she was going to answer." Staring at her, the gunman asked, "Why?" Before she could reply, he pulled the trigger and shot her through the temple, killing her instantly.

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In the weeks immediately following the killings in Littleton, newspaper columnists and magazine pundits—conservative and liberal alike—spent page after page trying to decide whether Harris and Klebold were somehow representative of America's teenagers, whether their actions symbolized a murderous insanity present in all of American society. Rumors about the boys surged in the first days after the killings: that they were angry homosexuals striking back at the homophobic culture of Colorado, that they'd chosen Hitler's birthday because they were Nazis, that they were racists, that their "Trenchcoat Mafia" school club was a front for Satanists.

The truth seems both simpler and more inexplicable. Children of fairly successful, middle-class suburban families (one father was a retired military officer), the two boys worked in the local pizza restaurant and used their home computers to walk through the World Wide Web collecting depravity—confirming themselves in an incoherent mishmash of anything that seemed shocking, dangerous, vile, or pornographic.

They liked guns because they'd been warned against them. They admired Hitler because they'd been told he was ultimate evil, embodying the absolute opposite of everything in their clean, gentle suburban lives. They toyed with a racism they neither had much occasion to use nor actually felt, merely because they'd been lectured repeatedly on how bad it was—and then Harris posted on his website a screed *against* racists. He posted diatribes as well against his neighbors, against the sort of athletes Hitler in fact praised, and even against people who used bad grammar. A sort of mocking, giggling indulgence of hatred seemed to be the only lens through which Eric Harris looked out at the world, and anyone who caught his attention, for any reason, deserved to die, because it was so much *fun* to imagine that they deserved to die: "If I say something, it goes. I am the law. . . . Feel no remorse, no sense of shame."

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There are hundreds of thousands of American teenagers playing at this cool, fun hatred. The dark comic books that celebrate it make millionaires out of their authors, and ironic, animated television shows like the deliberately crudely drawn *South Park* (set in a mythical Colorado resort town not far from Littleton) are advertising goldmines. The "goth" shock-rocker Marilyn Manson—whose albums Harris and Klebold collected—receives gold-record awards for promoting the frisson of hateful mockery. While his roadies hawk T-shirts reading "Kill Your Parents," Manson slashes himself with bits of glass, wears iris-warping contact lenses, declares himself the Antichrist, and parades with naked women on dog leashes. His autobiography, *The Long Hard Road Out of Hell*, which reached number sixteen on the *New York Times* best-seller list last year, includes —in the midst of its long anti-Christian tirades—an account of a champagne brunch he threw to celebrate his girlfriend's abortion and a laughing description of an infamous incident in which he'd buried, in several pounds of sliced luncheon meat snatched from a buffet table, a naked deaf girl who'd snuck backstage to service the band members.

This is what the hip nihilism of the French philosophy professors looks like after twenty years of commercialization have sanded it down to something vulgar enough to fit in the minds of middling teenagers —and, unsurprisingly, there eventually came along a pair of boys sufficiently detached from reality that they were willing not just to pose at it for a couple years before they went off to college, but to act on it, once and for all.

But there's a far more important question than whether or not Harris and Klebold symbolize what our children *have* become, and it's whether or not Cassie Bernall symbolizes what our children *will* become—for this murdered high school coed was not a typical American girl, and that's what may make all the difference. If the fourth Great Awakening that people have been predicting since the 1970s actually occurs, it will have begun on April 20, 1999, and Cassie Bernall will be its martyr, its catalyst, and its patron saint.

Out in Colorado, the mood of the crowds that gathered around the padlocked Columbine High School in the weeks after the killings was like that of a citywide, outdoor revival meeting: a little quieted by the funeral processions of the murdered victims, a little muted by the police barricades and yellow tape, but an amazingly public and unselfconscious display of Christian piety. On a park hill overlooking the school, a local carpenter, Greg Zanis, set up fifteen crosses, for the thirteen victims *and* the two murderers. Matt Labash, a writer for the *Weekly Standard* reporting from Littleton, tells of watching as the choir members singing "Amazing Grace" on the hilltop gently removed the pen from the hand of a woman who had scrawled "evil bastard" on one of the murderers' impromptu memorials and wiped clean the cross. Afterwards, the carpenter took down all the crosses to keep those of the murderers from being a temptation to those too hurt and angry to forgive—then put back up the thirteen victims' crosses, only to have them removed by the city's park service in response to a complaint by the local Freedom from Religion Foundation against the "monstrous Christian-oriented memorial" on public land.

The praying crowds seemed to have no special desire to hear politicians come to town and demand gun control, or television commentators denounce pornography on the Internet and violence in popular music and the failure of the public schools, or Hillary Clinton call from the White House for increased government spending on counselors and therapists to help children solve their problems "with words instead of weapons." Though President Clinton assigned $1.5 million federal CARE funds for counseling the survivors, and private donations have reached $5 million, no one seems sure what to do with the money.

The mourners wanted instead to hear the story of teenage girls with guns to their heads being asked to deny the Lord. Rachel Scott is a "Christian American martyr," her pastor declared at her funeral, and the thousands who'd lined up for her memorial service sang hymns of joy. "Now she's in heaven. She's so much better off than any of us," one of Cassie Bernall's friends told a reporter. "I just thank God she died that way," said another. "She's in the martyrs' hall of fame," her pastor at the West Bowles Evangelical Presbyterian Church declared at her funeral. "I am just so happy that Cassie is smiling down on us right now," added one of the parishioners who knew her. "She's in a good place." Strangers flew in from Florida, New York, and California to be at her funeral. Young Life, the evangelical ministry that had been working in her Columbine High School, held an impromptu prayer service for her in Denver in the week after her death, and 1,500 students showed up. A previously scheduled evangelical Teen Mania rally in Michigan on April 24 turned into a Cassie Bernall festival, with 73,000 teenagers in Pontiac's Silverdome weeping along with sermon after sermon about her death.

It is distinctly American for our social options to seem limited to either anarchy or Christian revival, with the ordinary civil society of liberal democracy merely the long arc between the extremes. But even the violence specialists, the child psychologists, and the grief counselors—the experts of the therapeutic culture who filled the television talk shows and the newspaper op-ed pages in the days after the Littleton deaths—ought to recognize this popular canonization of Cassie Bernall as healthier than their endless admonitions to "talk through with your children" the murderous impulses of Harris and

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Klebold. Which question is better put to an average sixteen-year-old: Can you imagine taking a gun and killing everyone who's ever made you mad? or, Can you imagine refusing to deny God at the cost of your life? To be a teenager is to fit *every* profile, to imagine oneself capable of anything. For such children, Harris and Klebold must be literally maddening, and Cassie Bernall literally inspiring.

Fearing that her death will help right-wing preachers whip up the "absurd" belief that Christians are a threatened minority in America when "the real martyrs today are in China and Sudan," one prominent Protestant commentator denied in the second week after the murder that Cassie Bernall had suffered anything that could properly be called martyrdom. She wasn't killed by any agency of a government aiming to suppress her religion, but merely by insane criminals aiming at thrills; her mocking assassins would almost certainly have shot her regardless of her answer; and she fell in the midst of other victims slaughtered for other reasons—or for no reason at all.

The fact remains, however, that Cassie Bernall died a death so archetypal, it is almost an adolescent's *fantasy* of martyrdom. She had no time to calculate the probabilities; she simply had a gun put to her head and the question of her faith posed in a context of life and death. It's like a fourteen-year-old boy's daydream of being martyred: a sudden rolling of life to a single point and an instantaneous fulfillment of Christ's promise in Matthew 10:32: "Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father." This is an image to move a child to enormous heroism and sacrifice, while Harris and Klebold form an image to engender insanity.

But Cassie Bernall's life and death contain the possibility of something much greater than merely a healthier psychologist's tool for (as one grief-management therapist put it in a television interview) "helping our young people deal with their feelings about the Littleton tragedy." In early March, in remarks at the end of a press conference announcing the formation of the exploratory committee for his presidential campaign, Texas Governor George W. Bush seemed for a moment to deny that he would work to overturn *Roe v. Wade*. Free-associating his way into actually praising President Clinton for his 1992 campaign slogan of "safe, legal, and rare," Bush rambled until he ended up appearing to doubt that he could do *anything* to help stop abortion until the American people had a complete "change of heart." Cassie Bernall's death could lead to exactly that changed heart: "Now undoubtedly it is, as it was in the days of John the Baptist, the axe is in an extraordinary manner laid at the root of the trees," as Jonathan Edwards declared in his famous 1741 Great Awakening sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

It's hard to tell how many of the stories now circulating about Cassie's life are completely accurate. She had undergone a conversion experience in Christian summer camp when she was fifteen, and there's always, in such stories, a temptation to exaggerate her goodness after her conversion. One of her friends relates that she was, in the days before her murder, planning to cut off the long hair that was her favorite feature and give it to an organization that makes wigs for children in chemotherapy. Another explains that she left her Christian school and returned to the Columbine public high school as a sophomore because it offered a greater opportunity for witnessing to nonbelievers. It's certainly true that her funeral was attended by the gang members, drug addicts, and street people she'd tried to evangelize as part of a Victory Outreach program in the Five Points neighborhood of Denver. But how much effect she'd had on them *before* her death remains undecidable.

Similarly, there's always a temptation in such stories to exaggerate her badness prior to her conversion. Back when she was in junior high school, Cassie had begun to dabble in witchcraft, alcohol, and drugs, her parents told ABC's religion reporter Peggy Wehmeyer. Some friends and family members claim that she was involved in weekend rituals involving cat sacrifices. Her youth minister, Dave McPherson, says now that he thought her beyond help: "There's some kids you meet that you think there's a chance, and there's other kids that you say, 'She's gone.' I never gave Cassie a hope. She was disconnected, she wasn't going to listen to anything, she was into black magic, the dark stuff."

This much is confirmed by multiple sources: After discovering letters describing violent acts she and her friends imagined doing to their parents, Brad and Misty Bernall acted on McPherson's advice. They enrolled their daughter in a Christian school, sent her on an intense weekend retreat, and prohibited her from leaving the house except to go to church. "It's hard," her father explained, "because you know you're taking a chance of driving your child further away from you." But one day Cassie came home, changed into a believer: "It's like she was in a dark room and somebody turned the light on, and she saw the beauty that was surrounding her." Her youth-group leader, Jeremiah Quinonez, recalls her telling him, "I went to this church camp and a bunch of people prayed around me. I don't know what happened, but I was just changed. I felt this huge burden lifted off my heart." (Cassie's mother has written *She Said 'Yes': The Unlikely Martyrdom of Cassie Bernall*, to be published in September.)

The girlish vocabulary of her letters can hide a little of the spiritual depths the girl seemed to be reaching for. "Isn't it amazing this plan we're a part of?" she wrote a friend. "I mean, it's a pretty big thing to be part of God's plan!" "Honestly, I want to live com-

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pletely for God," she wrote another. "It's hard and scary, but totally worth it."

But there is something undeniable and mature underneath her American teenager's phrasings, a deeply moving faith almost presciently circling in on the Christian tropes of martyrdom and death. In a poem her brother discovered on her desk the morning after her death, Cassie wrote of her willingness "to suffer and to die" with Christ: *Whatever it takes / I will be one who lives in the fresh / Newness of life of those who are / Alive from the dead.* On the videotape she made for her youth group the night before she died, she vowed to be "a good example to nonbelievers and also to Christians." Two weeks before she died, she wrote a letter to her friend Amanda Meyer, "It's so frustrating to be patient and wait for God's perfect timing. It's so hard to remember that his timing is not our timing. That he knows best. I need to learn to trust, be faithful and trusting . . . and choose his will."

The mainstream media has been surprisingly good at reporting the details of Cassie's story. Barbara Bradley related the death on National Public Radio in the first days after the murders. Peggy Wehmeyer reported the story repeatedly on ABC's evening news. The *Washington Post* felt compelled to put the word "martyr" in distancing quotation marks, but nonetheless carried the story on consecutive days, as did the *New York Times,* the *Los Angeles Times,* and many other papers. The *Chicago Tribune* called Cassie "humbling and awe-inspiring" (though warning that "absolutists . . . tend quickly to become absolutely intolerant and intolerable"). The *Weekly Standard* carried four commentaries on her death in addition to Matt Labash's cover story about her life and Christian conversion in Littleton.

Even the *reaction* to the Littleton murders has received some mainstream reporting. On May 31, *Time* carried an article called "A Surge of Teen Spirit." The *New York Times* ran a similar report on June 6, and *Newsweek* on June 14. But the power of Cassie's martyrdom remains an essentially underground story, moving along the Christian e-mail distribution lists and fax trees to bubble up in sermons and prayer-group discussions across the country. It's a growing belief that God is abroad again in America. It's an expanding notion that Cassie Bernall's death is not a meaningless tragedy but a call for repentance so profound it prohibits even blaming those as corrupt as Marilyn Manson or his murderous devotees, Harris and Klebold. It's an ever-widening faith that the whole pornographic, violent, anarchic disaster of popular American culture will soon be swept away. Not because (as the culture wars activists have been demanding for two decades) direct government action has been taken against the social corruption or because the court decisions that allowed it to flourish have been undone. Or at least not exactly. Those things are expected, but the people moved by Cassie Bernall's martyrdom perceive them to be almost incidental consequences of the national change of heart that is, after Littleton, trembling on the cusp of breaking forth. The Great Awakening began in New England, as Jonathan Edwards relates in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God,* when, at "the latter end of the year 1733, there appeared a very unusual flexibleness, and yielding to advice, in our young people."

Not everyone seems persuaded. Testifying before Congress on May 27, the father of the murdered Rachel Scott argued against gun control on the grounds that "Columbine was not just a tragedy—it was a spiritual event. . . . We need a change of heart and a humble acknowledgment that this nation was founded on the principle of simple trust in God." But Pastor Don Maxhousen denounced such "escapist theology" when he was reached in June by *Time* magazine for comment on the spiritual reaction to Columbine: "As a Lutheran, I would be helping a family focus on getting through a long dark period in their lives."

But there is, in the response to Littleton, the possibility of an answer to those who've offered a counsel of despair about the American soul. Last February, in a much-noticed open letter to his supporters, the longtime conservative activist Paul Weyrich declared that the culture wars were over—and that the Right had lost. "I no longer believe," he wrote, "that there is a moral majority." The only option for serious men and women is now to withdraw from the dominant American society by throwing out their TVs, homeschooling their children, and breaking off into small, lifeboat communities of the saved. In their book, *Blinded by Might,* issued a few weeks later, the columnist Cal Thomas and the former activist Ed Dobson declared that political work by groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition—"a bunch of moralizers who want to force a worldview down someone's throat"—has hurt Christian witness, which should enter the public square only to stand like a sheep among the wolves.

Christian leaders were not as quick as they might have been to see the promise of Cassie Bernall's death, and in the first weeks after the Littleton murders many on both the left and the right tried to force the story back into known territory. Franklin Graham, son of the evangelist Billy Graham, denounced the public schools. Boston's Bernard Cardinal Law complained that guns are "too accessible and too acceptable." "What is causing all this turmoil?" asked Susan Swanson of Chicago's Luther Memorial Church when reached for comment by the Associated Press. "The media? TV? The Internet? Music? Or far-right-wing hate groups?" In his first radio commentary on the April 20th shootings, Chuck Colson decried the corruptions of American culture. Only with his second commentary the next week did he focus on the

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surprising work of God in the martyrdom of Cassie and leave behind the culture wars rhetoric.

But the people whose job it is to sniff the wind almost immediately began to sense that something might be changing in America. Oprah Winfrey quickly moved to schedule Cassie's parents on her enormously popular television program. The Republicans began by promising a Clintonesque "national conversation" with the usual violence experts and child psychologists. But within two weeks their presidential candidates were in New Hampshire speaking of the martyred girl's effect on their hearts.

Curiously, President Clinton never seems to have sensed the change. In June, he was still trying to cast the murders in high-school therapy terms—and offered Columbine as a metaphor for Kosovo: "In both cases, there at least is some evidence that part of the problem was one group of people looking down on another group of people and getting to where they hated them and then getting to where they thought it was legitimate to take them out."

When Vice President Gore called for God's help in mourning the Littleton students, he was attacked from the left by Richard Cohen in the *Washington Post* for failing to demand gun control, and from the right by Focus on the Family's Tom Minnery for daring to mention God "only after it is too late." But he returned from Colorado to campaign in Iowa by staking out the reforming power of Cassie's martyrdom as the insight that distinguished him from his Democratic presidential rival, Bill Bradley.

"Imaginary evil is romantic and varied, full of charm; imaginary good is tiresome and flat," once wrote the twentieth-century French mystic Simone Weil. "Real evil, however, is dreary, monotonous, barren. Real good is always new, marvelous, intoxicating."

The evil of Harris and Klebold has at least discredited the hip adolescent pose of Marilyn Manson (who was forced by booking agents to cancel the remainder of a tour he'd just begun). It's discredited the pretend violence of the comic book culture and the supposed harmlessness of the "content neutrality" asserted by Internet providers. It may even have finally discredited the claim of groups like People for the American Way that religious hatred is the root cause of violence. Barry Lynn of Americans United for Separation of Church and State received considerable mocking when he issued a press statement on May 19 declaring that the Christian victims of Harris and Klebold were somehow responsible for the massacre: "Evidence indicates that the two students who killed their peers, and ultimately themselves, at Columbine High felt alienated and ostracized. . . . We know from experience that school-sponsored religious displays and worship invariably make some students feel like second-class citizens."

But the goodness of Cassie Bernall may do something far more than these small victories over a corrupt popular culture bought by fifteen deaths in Littleton, Colorado. It may deliver a victory in the culture wars so massive that all the narrow policy wars are simply forgotten. To picture her standing there trembling in the school library, with a gun to her head, the question "Do you believe in God?" hanging in the air, is to believe that a change of heart is possible, that God may be loose in America again, that the pendulum may have finally begun its long arc back. FT

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A Clash of Orthodoxies

Robert P. George

A few years ago, the eminent Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington published in *Foreign Affairs* a widely noted article called "The Clash of Civilizations." Looking at contemporary international relations from a geopolitical vantage point, he predicted a clash of the world's major civilizations: the West, the Islamic world, and the Confucian East. Huntington's article provoked a response from one of his own most brilliant former students—Swarthmore's James Kurth. In an article in the *National Interest* entitled "The Real Clash," Kurth argued persuasively that the clash that is coming—and has, indeed, already begun—is not so much among the world's great civilizations as it is within the civilization of the West, between those who claim the Judeo-Christian worldview and those who have abandoned that worldview in favor of the "isms" of contemporary American life—feminism, multiculturalism, gay liberationism, lifestyle liberalism—what I here lump together as a family called "the secularist orthodoxy."

This clash of worldviews is sometimes depicted (though not by Professor Kurth) as a battle between the forces of "faith" and those of "reason." I propose to challenge this depiction in a particular and fundamental way. I shall argue that the Christian moral view is rationally defensible. Indeed, my claim is that Christian moral teaching can be shown to be rationally superior to orthodox secular moral beliefs.

In defending the rational strength of Christian morality, I do not mean either to denigrate faith or to deny the importance—indeed, the centrality—of God's revealed Word in the Bible, or of sacred Christian tradition. My aim is to offer a philosophical defense of Christian morality, and to put forward a challenge to the secularist worldview that has established itself as an orthodoxy in the academy and other elite sectors of Western culture.

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First, let's get clear what is at stake in the conflict between Christian (and Jewish and to a large extent Islamic) morality and the secularist orthodoxy. The issues immediately in play have mainly, though not exclusively, to do with sexuality, the transmitting and taking of human life, and the place of religion and religiously informed moral judgment in public life.

According to the secularist orthodoxy, a child prior to birth—or some other marker event sometime before or soon after birth, such as the emergence of detectable brain-wave function or the acquisition of self-awareness—has no right not to be killed at the direction of its mother, no right, at least, that the law may legitimately recognize and protect. At the other edge of life, orthodox secularists believe that every individual has a right to commit suicide and to be assisted in committing suicide, should that person, for whatever reasons, prefer death to life.

In short, secularism rejects the proposition central to the Judeo-Christian tradition of thought about issues of life and death: that human life is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, good and therefore morally inviolable. It rejects traditional morality's condemnation of abortion, suicide, infanticide of so-called defective children, and certain other life-taking acts.

The secularist orthodoxy also rejects the Judeo-Christian understanding of marriage as a bodily, emotional, and spiritual union of one man and one woman, ordered to the generating, nurturing, and educating of children, marked by exclusivity and permanence, and consummated and actualized by acts that are reproductive in type, even if not, in every case, in fact. Marriage, for secularists, is a legal convention whose goal is to support a merely emotional union—which may or may not, depending upon the

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subjective preferences of the partners, be marked by commitments of exclusivity and permanence, which may or may not be open to children depending on whether partners want children, and in which sexual acts of any type mutually agreeable to the partners are perfectly acceptable.

As any type of mutually agreeable consensual sexual act is considered as good as any other, secularist orthodoxy rejects the idea, common not only to Judaism and Christianity but to the world's other great cultures and religious traditions, that marriage is an inherently heterosexual institution. According to secularist orthodoxy, same-sex "marriages" are no less truly marriages than those between partners of opposite sexes who happen to be infertile.

And orthodox secularism, consistent with its view of what marriage is, declines to view marriage as the principle of rectitude in sexual conduct. So orthodox secularists reject as utterly benighted the notion that sex outside of marriage is morally wrong. For them, what distinguishes morally good from bad sex is not whether it is marital, but, rather, whether it is consensual. The consent of the parties involved (or, as in the case of adultery, other parties with a legitimate interest) is the touchstone of sexual morality. So long as there is no coercion or deception involved, orthodox secularism proposes no ground of moral principle for rejecting premarital sex, promiscuity, "open" marriage, etc.

It is not that all secularists believe that sexual passions should be completely unrestrained; it is rather that they conceive constraints on sexual activity other than the principle of consent as merely prudential in nature rather than moral. For example, secularists may counsel against promiscuity, but will do so not on the moral ground that it damages the integrity of people who engage in it, but rather on the prudential ground that it courts disease, unwanted pregnancy, and general unhappiness—which of course it does. To the extent, however, that "safe-sex" techniques can reduce the risk of these and other bad consequences of promiscuity, orthodox secularism proposes no ground for avoiding it.

On the question of the place of religion and religiously informed moral judgment in public life, orthodox secularism stands for the strict and absolute separation of not only church and state, but also faith and public life: no prayer, not even an opportunity for silent prayer, in public schools; no aid to parochial schools; no displays of religious symbols in the public square; no legislation based on the religiously informed moral convictions of legislators or voters.

Here secularism goes far beyond the views shared by most Americans: namely, that everyone should enjoy the right to be free from coercion in matters of religious belief, expression, and worship; that people should not suffer discrimination or disabilities under civil law based on their religious beliefs and affiliations; and that government should be evenhanded in its treatment of religious groups. Secularism aims to privatize religion altogether, to render religiously informed moral judgment irrelevant to public affairs and public life, and to establish itself, secularist ideology, as the nation's public philosophy.

Orthodox secularism promotes the myth that there is only one basis for disbelieving its tenets: namely, the claim that God has revealed propositions contrary to these tenets. Most orthodox secularists would have us believe that their positions are fully and decisively vindicated by reason and therefore can be judged to have been displaced only on the basis of irrational or, at least, nonrational faith.* They assert that they have the reasonable position; any claims to the contrary must be based on unreasoned faith. Secularists are in favor of a "religious freedom" that allows everyone to believe as he wishes, but claims based on this "private faith" must not be the grounds of public policy. Policy must be based on what secularists have lately come to call "public reason."

Interestingly, there have been two different lines of response by religious people to this myth promoted by orthodox secularism.

Some concede that religious and even moral judgments depend on faith that cannot be rationally grounded, but they argue that secularism itself is based on a nonrational faith, that secularism must, in the end, also rest on metaphysical and moral claims that cannot be proved. In that way, they sug-

* A minority party within the secularist camp defends secularist ideology not on the ground that its tenets are true or vindicated by reason—secularists of this stripe deny the possibility of moral truth or the power of reason to make sound moral judgments of any type—but on the purely prudential ground that the official commitment of public institutions to secularism is the only way of preserving social peace. Ultimately, this is a hopeless strategy for defending secularism. It must implicitly appeal to the idea of moral truth and invoke the authority of reason (if, for no other purpose, than to establish the value of social peace) even as it officially denies that moral truth is possible and that reason has any real authority.

Moreover, there is simply no warrant for believing that social peace is likely, or more likely, to be preserved by committing our public institutions to secularist ideology. Partisans of worldviews that compete with secularism are, to say the least, unlikely to surrender these institutions to the forces of secularism without a fight; nor is there any reason for them to do so. Consider the issue of abortion: Christians, observant Jews, and others who oppose the taking of unborn human life do not consider a circumstance in which more than a million elective abortions are performed each year to be a situation of "social peace." They quite reasonably reject secularism's claim to constitute nothing more than a neutral playing field on which other worldviews may fairly and civilly compete for the allegiance of the people. As the example of abortion makes clear, secularism is itself one of the competing worldviews. We should credit its claims to neutrality no more than we would accept the claims of a baseball pitcher who in the course of a game declares himself to be umpire and begins calling his own balls and strikes.

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gest, secularism is just like religion, and is not entitled to any special standing that would qualify it as the nation's public philosophy. In fact, its standing would be less than that of the Judeo-Christian tradition, since it is not the tradition upon which the country was founded. On this account, secularism itself is a sectarian doctrine and, as such, is incapable of fulfilling its own demands of being accessible to "public reason."

A second response by people of faith to the myth promoted by orthodox secularism is to affirm the demand for public reasons for public policies and offer to do battle with secularism on the field of rational debate. Those who take this view tend to agree that secularism is itself a sectarian doctrine, but they claim that religious faith, and especially religiously informed moral judgment, can be based upon and defended by appeal to publicly accessible reasons. Indeed, they argue that sound religious faith and moral theology will be informed, in part, by insight into the authentic and fully public reasons provided by principles of natural law and natural justice.

These principles are available for rational affirmation by people of good will and sound judgment, even apart from their revelation by God in the Scriptures and in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. Based on this view, it is possible for Christians to join forces with believing Jews, Muslims, and people from other religious traditions who share a commitment to the sanctity of human life and to other moral principles.

These two distinct lines of response to orthodox secularism are not entirely incompatible. They agree that secularism itself is a sectarian doctrine with its own metaphysical and moral presuppositions and foundations, with its own myths, and, one might even argue, its own rituals. It is a pseudo-religion. Christians can also agree that orthodox secularism is caught in a dilemma. By defining "public reason" stringently enough to exclude appeals to natural law principles, secularism will make it impossible for its own proponents to meet its demand for public reasons. If, on the other hand, it loosens the definition of public reasons sufficiently to pass its own test, it will not be able to rule out principles of natural law, natural rights, or natural justice, as in: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, and that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—appeals to "the laws of nature and nature's God."

Both religious responses I have outlined deny that reason vindicates secularist morality. The first, however, denies that reason can identify moral truths, content with the claim that secularism is no more rational than, say, Christian belief. The second, by contrast, accepts the proposition that reason can and should be used to identify moral truths, including truths of political morality, but claims that Judeo-Christian morality is rationally superior to the morality of orthodox secularism. As already noted, this is my own position.

Let's take the central issues of life and death. If we lay aside all the rhetorical grandstanding and obviously fallacious arguments, questions of abortion, infanticide, suicide, and euthanasia turn on the question of whether bodily life is intrinsically good, as Judaism and Christianity teach, or merely instrumentally good, as orthodox secularists believe.

If the former, then even the life of an early embryo or a severely retarded child or a comatose person has value and dignity. Their value and dignity are not to be judged by what they can do, how they feel, how they make us feel, or what we judge their "quality" of life to be. Their value and dignity transcend the instrumental purposes to which their lives can be put. They enjoy a moral inviolability that will be respected and protected in any fully just regime of law.

If bodily life is, as orthodox secularists believe, merely a means to other ends and not an end in itself, then a person who no longer gets what he wants out of life may legitimately make a final exit by suicide. If he is unable to commit suicide under his own power, he is entitled to assistance. If he is not lucid enough to make the decision for himself, then judgment must be substituted for him by the family or by a court to make the "right to die" effectively available to him.

Secularists would have us believe that, apart from revelation, we have no reason to affirm the intrinsic goodness and moral inviolability of human life. That simply isn't true. In fact, the secularist proposition that bodily life is merely instrumentally good entails a metaphysical dualism of the person and the body that is rationally untenable.

Implicit in the view that human life is merely instrumentally and not intrinsically valuable is a particular understanding of the human person as an essentially non-bodily being who inhabits a nonpersonal body. According to this understanding—which contrasts with the Judeo-Christian view of the human person as a dynamic unity of body, mind, and spirit—the "person" is the conscious and desiring "self" as distinct from the body which may exist (as in the case of pre- and post-conscious human beings) as a merely "biological," and, thus, sub-personal, reality.* But the dualistic view of the human person

* It is true that some Christians embrace a certain form of person/body dualism, believing it necessary to identify the human person with the soul as distinct from the body in order to avoid materialism and/or affirm the existence of the immaterial human soul or its immortality. According to this form of dualism, the body, though not an intrinsic part of the person, may nevertheless enjoy a certain dignity by virtue of its association with the soul so that the deliberate destruction of the body, as in suicide, euthanasia, and abortion, may therefore be morally wrongful. Still, the body remains an essentially sub-personal reality and does not in itself participate in the dignity of the

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makes nonsense of the experience all of us have in our activities of being dynamically unified actors—of being, that is, embodied persons and not persons who merely "inhabit" our bodies and direct them as extrinsic instruments under our control, like automobiles. We don't sit in the physical body and direct it as an instrument, the way we sit in a car and make it go left or right.

This experience of unity of body, mind, and spirit is itself no mere illusion. Philosophical arguments have undermined any theory that purports to demonstrate that the human being is, in fact, two distinct realities, namely, a "person" and a (sub-personal) body. Any such theory will, unavoidably, contradict its own starting point, since reflection necessarily begins from one's own conscious awareness of oneself as a unitary actor. So the defender of dualism, in the end, will never be able to identify the "I" who undertakes the project of reflection. He will simply be unable to settle whether the "I" is the conscious and desiring aspect of the "self," or the "mere living body." If he seeks to identify the "I" with the former, then he separates himself inexplicably from the living human organism that is recognized by others (and, indeed, by himself) as the reality whose behavior (thinking, questioning, asserting, etc.) constitutes the philosophical enterprise in question. And if, instead, he identifies the "I" with that "mere living body," then he leaves no role for the conscious and desiring aspect of the "self" which, on the dualistic account, is truly the "person." As a recent treatment of the subject sums up the matter: "Person" (as understood in dualistic theories) and "mere living body" are "constructs neither of which refers to the unified self who had set out to explain his or her own reality; both of them purport to refer to realities other than that unified self but somehow, inexplicably, related to it." In short, "person/body dualisms" purport to be theories of something, but cannot, in the end, identify something of which to be the theory.

From these arguments one rationally concludes that the body, far from being a nonpersonal and indeed sub-personal instrument at the direction and disposal of the conscious and desiring "self," is irreducibly part of the personal reality of the human being. It is properly understood, therefore, as fully sharing in the dignity—the intrinsic worth—of the person and deserving the respect due to persons precisely as such.

A comatose human being is a comatose person. The early embryo is a human being and, precisely as such, a person—the same person who will be an infant, a toddler, an adolescent, an adult. The genetically complete, distinct, dynamically unified, self-integrating human organism that we currently identify as, say, the sixty-three-year-old Father Richard John Neuhaus is the same organism, the same human being—the same person—who was once a twenty-eight-year-old civil rights and anti-war activist, a precocious sixteen-year-old high school student, a mischievous adolescent, a toddler, an infant, a fetus, an embryo. Although he has grown and changed in many ways, no change of nature (or "substance") occurred as he matured—with his completeness, distinctness, unity, and identity fully intact—from the embryonic through the fetal, infant, child, and adolescent stages of his development, and finally into adulthood. He was a human being—a whole, living member of the species Homo sapiens—from the start. He did not become a human being sometime after he came to be; nor will he cease being a human being prior to his ceasing to be (i.e., his dying). In view of these facts, it is evident that the central ground of the secularist defense of abortion, infanticide, suicide, and euthanasia is decisively undercut. And it is undercut, not by appeal to revelation, as important as revealed truth is to the life of faith, but by engagement directly with the best arguments that secularists make on the very plane in which they make them.

Much the same is true in the area of sexual morality. Secularists would have us believe that marriage is a social and legal convention that in a variety of possible ways serves a purely emotional bond between two persons. (And if it is a purely emotional bond, some ask, why only two?) They believe that, apart from revealed religious doctrine (which other people may, in the exercise of their religious freedom, happen not to share), no one has reasons for believing marriage to be anything more. Again, this is untrue.

Marriage is a basic human good. By that I mean it is an intrinsic good that provides noninstrumental reasons for choice and action, reasons which are knowable and understandable even apart from divine revelation. Rational reflection on marriage as it is participated in by men and women makes it clear: since men and women are essentially embodied (and not simply inhabitors of a suit of flesh), the biological union of spouses in reproductive-type acts consummates and actualizes their marriage, making the spouses truly, and not merely metaphorically, "two

person. A homicidal act does not actually destroy a person, though it may nevertheless constitute the wrongful destruction of a person's body. This view, whose proponents can claim the patronage of Plato and Descartes, was rejected by Aquinas and other great Christian thinkers for what I believe to be excellent reasons. They saw that it is by no means logically (or, for that matter, theologically) necessary to identify the human person with the soul as distinct from the body, and thus to deny that bodily life is intrinsic to the human person, in order to avoid materialism or to affirm the soul's existence and immortality. One needn't deny the soul's existence or immortality in order to affirm that the human person is a unity of body and soul—both being intrinsic parts of the person. As the doctrine of the resurrection of the body makes clear, human beings are saved and exist in eternity as bodily persons, not as disembodied souls.

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in one flesh." The sexual union of spouses—far from being something extrinsic to marriage or merely instrumental to procreation, pleasure, the expression of tender feelings, or anything else—is an essential aspect of marriage as an intrinsic human good. Marital acts are the biological matrix of the multi-level (bodily, emotional, dispositional, spiritual) sharing of life and commitment that marriage is.

But, one might ask, is a true bodily or "biological" union of persons possible? Indeed it is. Consider that for most human functions or activities, say, digestion or locomotion, the organism performing the function or act is the individual human being. In respect of the act of reproduction, however, things are different. Reproduction is a single act or function, yet it is performed by a male and female as a mated pair. For purposes of reproduction, the male and female partners become a single organism, they form a single reproductive principle. This organic unity is achieved precisely in the reproductive behavior characteristic of the species—even in cases (such as those of infertile couples) in which the nonbehavioral conditions of reproduction do not obtain.

Properly understood in light of a non-dualistic account of the human person, the goodness of marriage and marital intercourse simply cannot be reduced to the status of a mere means to pleasure, feelings of closeness, or any other extrinsic goal. Indeed, it cannot legitimately be treated (as some Christians have, admittedly, sought to treat it) as a mere means to procreation, though children are among the central purposes of marriage and help to specify its meaning as a moral reality even for married couples who cannot have children.

So marital acts realize the unity of marriage, which includes the coming to be of children. In consensual nonmarital sex acts, then, people damage this unity, the integrity of the marriage, inasmuch as the body is part of the personal reality of the human being and no mere sub-personal instrument to be used and disposed of to satisfy the subjective wants of the conscious and desiring part of the "self."

The psychosomatic integrity of the person is another of the basic or intrinsic goods of the human person. This integrity is disrupted in any sexual act that lacks the common good of marriage as its central specifying point. Where sex is sought purely for pleasure, or as a means of inducing feelings of emotional closeness, or for some other extrinsic end, the body is treated as a sub-personal, purely instrumental, reality. This existential separation of the body and the conscious and desiring part of the self serves literally to dis-integrate the person. It takes the person apart, disrupting the good of acting as the dynamically unified being one truly is.

Did our Christian forebears invent this idea of integrity? Did they dream up the notion that sexual immorality damages integrity by dis-integrating the person? No. Christianity has had, to be sure, a very important role in promoting and enhancing our understanding of sexual morality. But in the dialogues of Plato and the teachings of Aristotle, in the writings of Plutarch and the great Roman stoic Musonius Rufus, and, of course, in Jewish tradition, one can find the core of this central, important teaching about the way sex is so central to integrity, and therefore so central not only to us as individuals but to us as a community. Dis-integrated, individual human beings cannot form an integrated community.

Secularist orthodoxy—unlike not only Christianity and Judaism but also the classical philosophical tradition—both misidentifies the good to be realized in marriage (imagining that the value of marriage and marital sexual intercourse is purely instrumental to other goods, rather than something good in itself) and overlooks the harm—the dis-integration of persons and the communities they form—which grounds the Christian, Jewish, and classical condemnations of nonmarital sex.

Of course, there are various possible objections to the arguments I have been advancing. Secularists cannot honestly say, however, that these arguments appeal to religious dogmas or fail to state public reasons for, say, forbidding abortion and euthanasia, or preserving the institution of marriage as traditionally understood. The reasons I have identified are central among the reasons why the Christian tradition has rejected abortion and euthanasia and supported the institution of marriage. This is not to deny that Christians, like our Jewish "elder brothers" in faith, seek the illumination and full understanding of moral principles in the light of Scripture and sacred tradition. But Christians and other believers need not —and typically do not—suggest that abortion, for example, is wrong (or that we know it to be wrong) because God whispered it into our ear, or the ear of a pope or another religious leader, or even into the ear of a sacred writer.

The wrongness of abortion follows from the truth —fully accessible even to unaided reason—that the life of a human being is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, good. As a Christian, I believe that each human life is a precious gift from God. But even if one doesn't share that belief, reason nevertheless grasps the truth that human life is intrinsically, and not merely instrumentally, valuable. Reason detects the falsity of the dualistic presuppositions of secularism's belief that human life is merely instrumentally valuable. It identifies the unreasonableness of denying that every innocent human being—irrespective of age, size, stage of development, or condition of dependency—has an inviolable moral right to life.

Reason affirms that if any of us have a right to life, then all of us have it; if we have it at one stage of life, we have it at every stage of life; if we have it in the middle of life, we have it at both edges. There is no rational argument that anybody has been able to come

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up with—and the best and the brightest in the academy have struggled for more than twenty-five years to do so—that shows that a healthy thirteen-year-old or forty-two-year-old has a right to life, but a comatose eighty-year-old or an unborn child has no right to life. There is no rational basis for distinguishing a class of human beings who have a right to life (and other fundamental human rights) and a class of human beings who do not. This is the moral core of the great "self-evident truth" upon which our nation was founded: the proposition that all of us are "created equal."

Knowledge of this truth does not presuppose Christian faith, although biblical revelation profoundly enriches our understanding of it, and often enough leads to religious conversion. There are many examples of this. A notable recent case is that of Bernard Nathanson, a founder of the organization now known as the National Abortion and Reproductive Rights Action League. He was an atheist and a practicing abortionist who had taken the lives of many unborn children, including one of his own. But he gradually came to see that the deliberate killing of unborn human beings is a violation of the most basic principle of morality and natural justice. So he abandoned the practice of abortion and relinquished his important role in the advocacy of abortion as a political matter. Soon, he joined the pro-life movement and began working to roll back the abortion license. A few years later, he abandoned atheism and entered into Christian faith—which to him made sense of, grounded, and profoundly enriched the basic moral understanding that he had initially achieved by way of rational, self-critical reflection.

Orthodox secularist moral belief portrays personal morality as being essentially concerned with extrinsic constraints upon appetite or passion. It presupposes that the ultimate motives for whatever we do are grounded in our desires; reason's role is purely instrumental. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume, a founding father of modern secularism, summed up the position: "Reason is and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and may never pretend to any office other than to serve and obey them." Reason's role, in other words, is not to identify what is rational, what people should want, but merely to devise means of obtaining goals that people happen to want.

Ultimately, this view of reason makes it impossible to vindicate any fundamental moral principles, including any fundamental human rights. If reason is purely instrumental and can't tell us what to want but only how to get to what we want, how can we say that people have a fundamental right to freedom of speech? Freedom of the press? Freedom of religion? Privacy? Where do those fundamental rights come from? What is their basis? Why respect someone else's rights?

By contrast, the Christian understanding of morality starts from an appreciation of the basic human goods that provide more than merely instrumental reasons for action. In right moral actions people choose for the sake of these goods in ways that are compatible with the fulfillment and well-being of individuals and communities. Morality's understanding of human flourishing provides more-than-merely-instrumental reasons for action. Emotion or passion, when rightly ordered, supports what reason commends and helps us to accomplish the morally good ends that we have basic reasons to pursue.

Here again the Christian view lines up in important ways with that of the pre-Christian Greek philosophers—Plato and Aristotle, in particular—in understanding reason to be the master of passion in what the ancient thinkers unhesitatingly referred to as the "rightly ordered soul."

Of course, Christianity, like classical philosophy, understands perfectly well that the soul can be wrongly ordered, that emotion or passion can overcome reason and reduce it to the status of a slave that produces rationalizations for morally wrongful behavior. That is what Christians call sin. Yes it happens, but our goal should be to order our souls rightly so that reason controls passion, and not the other way around. When passion is in control, reason is reduced to a mere instrument, becoming its own worst enemy as it cooks up rationalizations for actions that we know to be morally wrong.

Christians can and should challenge at the most fundamental level secularism's instrumentalist view of reason and morality. Secularism's account of the relationship between reason and desire, far from being brutally rigorous in eschewing unprovable metaphysical hypotheses, rests upon and entails metaphysical propositions that not only are controversial, but in the end (say, in the case of person/body dualism) are demonstrably false.

Chief among secularism's philosophical vulnerabilities is its implicit denial of free choice or free will. People can make free choices just to the extent that they are capable of understanding and acting upon reasons that are not reducible to desire or emotion. In denying the possibility of rationally motivated action, secularism denies the possibility of free choice since it claims that we don't, in any fundamental sense, cause our own actions. What are they caused by? Either by the force of external pressures (whether one knows it or not), or by internal factors (such as desires). In the secularist worldview, "hard" and "soft" forms of determinism constitute the universe of possible accounts of all human behavior. Free choice is written off as an illusion.

Christian philosophers such as Germain Grisez, Joseph M. Boyle, Jr., and Olaf Tollefsen have rigorously shown, however, that the denial of free choice is rationally untenable, because it is a self-referentially

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contradictory claim, a self-defeating proposition. No one can rationally deny free choice, or claim as illusory our ordinary experience of freely choosing, without presupposing the possibility of free choice. To deny free choice is to claim that it is more rational to believe that there is no free choice than to believe that there is. But this, in turn, presupposes that one can identify norms of rationality and freely choose to conform one's beliefs to those norms. It presupposes that we are free to affirm the truth or falsity of a proposition, our desires or emotions or preferences to the contrary notwithstanding. Otherwise, the assertion of no free choice is pointless. The person who says people can't freely choose presupposes that there are reasons for accepting his claim, otherwise his act of asserting it would be pointless. But our ability to understand and act upon such reasons is incompatible with the idea that one is caused by his desires or by outside forces to accept or not accept such claims. So someone who denies free choice implicitly contradicts his own claim.

Here again, orthodox secularists are stuck, not because they have been beaten over the head with the Bible, but on the plane where they have made the argument—the plane of rationality. No position can be reasonable if it is self-referentially inconsistent, if it presupposes the opposite of the very claim it asserts. But if the "no free choice" claim is self-defeating, then we have an additional reason for affirming the existence of basic, intelligible, understandable reasons for action—reasons that are not reducible to desires or emotions or merely instrumental to the satisfaction of desires. And we have an additional reason for rejecting secularism's conception of morality as basically concerned with extrinsic restraints on appetite, rather than the integral directiveness of the basic human goods that provide such reasons for action.

Orthodox secularists typically say that we should respect the rights of others, even as we go about the business of satisfying our own desires. Ultimately, however, secularism cannot provide any plausible account of where rights come from or why we should respect others' rights. Of course, most secularists emphatically believe that people have rights. Indeed, they frequently accuse Christians and other religious believers of supporting policies that violate people's rights. We are all familiar with the rhetoric: You religious people shouldn't be imposing your values on other people. You are violating their rights! If it is between consenting adults, stay out of it! Any two (or more?) people have the right to define "marriage" for themselves. Women have a right to abortion. People have a right to take their own lives. Who are you to say otherwise?

But on the presuppositions of the secularist view, why should anybody respect anybody else's rights? What is the reason for respecting rights? Any answer must state a moral proposition, but what, on orthodox secularist premises, could provide the ground of its moral truth?

You may ask, Why doesn't the secularist cheerfully affirm moral subjectivism or moral relativism? Indeed, isn't some sort of moral relativism at the heart of secularism?

While one still hears subjectivism or relativism invoked at cocktail parties and in undergraduate classrooms—and even occasionally in faculty lounges—it seems that the heyday of moral relativism is over, even among doctrinaire secularists. Most sophisticated secularists have concluded that relativism is ultimately inconsistent with many of their own cherished moral claims, particularly those having to do with claims about rights—the right to abortion, the right to sexual freedom, the right to die. As the distinguished liberal political philosopher Joel Feinberg has warned: "Liberals must beware of relativism —or, at least, of a sweeping relativism—lest they be hoist on their own petard."

If relativism is true, then it is not wrong in principle to have an abortion, but neither is it wrong for people who happen to abhor abortion to attempt to legislate against it or to interfere with someone else's having an abortion by, say, blockading clinics or even shooting abortionists. Claims of a right to abortion are manifestly moral claims. Claims that it is wrong to shoot abortionists are moral claims. They could possibly be true only if moral relativism and subjectivism are false. So the mainstream of orthodox secularism at the end of the twentieth century has become self-consciously moralistic and nonrelativistic.

This is not to say that secularism is no longer, in significant respects, a relativist doctrine. It is merely to say that secularism is no longer a thoroughgoing and self-consciously relativist doctrine. Insofar as it remains relativistic, it has a massive philosophical problem. Secularism, at least in its liberal manifestations, makes the rights of others the principle of moral constraints upon action, relativizing allegedly self-regarding actions. But it generates a critical question it has no way of answering: Why should anyone respect the rights of others? Merely prudential answers—such as, people should respect the rights of others so that others will respect their rights, or people should respect the rights of others to avoid being punished—simply won't do. The fact is that people can often get away with violating others' rights. And they know it. And many do it.

If people shouldn't violate the rights of others, it must be because doing so is morally wrong, but on the secularist account why is it morally wrong? What is the source of its moral wrongness? The eminent philosopher and Christian convert Alasdair MacIntyre observes that traditions of thought about morality go into crisis when they generate questions they lack the resources to answer. By this standard, orthodox secularism is a tradition in crisis. It generates the question, Why should I respect the rights of others?

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Yet it possesses no resources for answering it.

By contrast, Christian thought understands that human rights are rooted in intelligible and basic human goods. It, therefore, has no logical difficulty explaining why each of us has an obligation to respect the rights of others, as well as to act in conformity with other moral principles. And recent Christian teaching, including the teaching of popes and Protestant bodies, speaks unhesitatingly of universal human rights, without fear of collapsing into relativism or individualism of the sort that is characteristic of orthodox secularism.

It is true that church teaching about human rights often overlaps with liberal secularist ideology. For example, Christian conservatives and liberal secularists agree on certain questions pertaining to religious freedom and have sometimes—as in the case of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act—joined together in political coalitions.

When church teaching and secularist ideology overlap, particularly on the question of rights, Christian thought has proved itself capable of giving a far superior account of these rights and why each of us has an obligation to respect the rights of others. From this I conclude that Christian teaching is rationally superior to secularism, not only when these worldviews disagree, as over abortion, euthanasia, marriage, and family, but even when they agree.

At the end of the day, whatever is to be said for and against secularism, there can be no legitimate claim for secularism to be a "neutral" doctrine that deserves privileged status as the national public philosophy. As MacIntyre has argued, secularism (which he calls liberalism) is far from being a "tradition-independent" view that merely represents a neutral playing field on which Judaism, Christianity, Marxism, and other traditions can wage a fair fight for the allegiance of the people. Instead, it is itself a tradition of thought about personal and political morality that competes with others.

Secularism rests upon and represents a distinct and controversial set of metaphysical and moral propositions having to do with the relationship of consciousness to bodiliness and of reason to desire, the possibility of free choice, and the source and nature of human dignity and human rights. Secularist doctrine contains very controversial views about what constitutes a person—views every bit as controversial as the Jewish and Christian views. Secularism is a philosophical doctrine that stands or falls depending on whether its propositions can withstand arguments advanced against them by representatives of other traditions. I have tried to show that secularist orthodoxy cannot withstand the critique to be advanced against it by the tradition of Christian philosophy. FT

A Poem Ending in the Preposition "with"

"You can fail love, but love will never fail you."

. . . an idea so luminous,
so . . . so . . . amazing

that most of us
have to make up conditions:

Thus, love comes free,
but not for you or me.

we have to deserve it,
we have to be worthy of it

and thus we live for the if of ever
wondering always whether

we have failed again
or have somehow earned

what was always there to begin
with.

Michael S. Glaser

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Pascal: The First Modern Christian

Edward T. Oakes

As a way of dividing up history into discrete, manageable wholes, the habit of clustering events according to centuries is probably no more (or less) superficial than any other. And surely it must be safer and more reliable than bandying about such descriptive monikers as "the Age of Faith," "the Enlightenment," "the Atomic Age," and so on, for at least the century-unit is known to be arbitrary, stemming as it does from the decimal system of numbering, which itself probably arose from the happenstance of ten fingers on the pair of human hands.

Unfortunately, the broad-stroke descriptive label, like some post-it note that sticks to everything it touches, will often enough get applied to the century marker in any case—despite the objections of more fastidious historians, who rightly fear that this habit of nomenclature may seduce the unwary. For such catch-all tags as "Age of Anxiety," "Age of Chivalry," etc. can be wildly inaccurate, or at least too sweeping. And no name for a century has been more misleading than that often used for the seventeenth: the Age of Reason. Not only did this century see the worst of the witch-hunting craze, but it also had to endure the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), at root a European civil war of religion—and, like all wars of religion, a clash of unbridled irrationality.

Yet just as centuries take on a certain inevitable identity from the very habit of invoking them so often (hence this Millennium Series), so too do these centuries soon come to assume the very descriptive characteristics by which they have so frequently been identified. Not for nothing has the seventeenth century, despite its infamous displays of irrationality, been known as the Age of Reason. Any century that began with René Descartes (1596-1650) as a five-year-old boy and concluded with Voltaire (1694-1778) as a seven-year-old, and during which Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) lived most of their lives and Baruch Spinoza all of his (1632-1677), is bound to strike later centuries as an eminently rational era.

However repellent and violent the wars of religion were or however vehement the waning years of the witch-burning craze undoubtedly must have been, we cannot help but see the seventeenth century in terms of what our civilization has embraced and what, on the basis of that embrace, it has abjured. Wars of religion and witch-burning appall. Reason is hailed as the splendor of our species (yes, even today, despite what the Nietzscheans and Heideggerians might claim). Thus the Age of Reason is celebrated for what we most value in it, and in ourselves. We condemn its horrors, but only on the basis of its glories.

Indeed, very few textbooks in the history of philosophy would deny to Descartes, that quintessential man of the seventeenth century, the title of Founding Father of modern philosophy—and precisely because of his systematic and methodical elevation of reason. His method for rational inquiry, based on consistently held doubt toward all doctrinaire assumptions of the human mind, is usually seen as modernity's decisive break-out from the fettering chains of the medieval synthesis, which itself was formed from a prior fusion of reason and faith painstakingly soldered together over several centuries in the late Middle Ages. Because of Descartes, reason now regards itself as a fully adult faculty, free at last of the tutelage of dogma and tradition. It is to Descartes, above all, that we owe the idea of rationality as an all-purpose acid through which every tenaciously held belief of the human mind must pass.

In that setting Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) emerges as the man who became, as I shall argue in the rest of this essay, "the first modern Christian." I would even include in that judgment the deep reticence and

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privacy of his spiritual life, for Pascal rarely revealed the movements of his soul to any but his most trusted spiritual directors. Modernity often regards religion as a private affair of the heart and looks askance at too public displays of religious emotion; and there too Pascal strikes a remarkably modern note. Except for a few passing references in his letters, he rarely mentioned even the most important biographical milestones that determined his career. In fact, it is only because he sewed a parchment memorial of the event inside his coat pocket that history knows of the most important incident in his life—his "Night of Fire" on November 23, 1654, when for about two hours he was overwhelmed by tears of joy at the realization that the God of the philosophers was not the God of the Bible. No doubt he had always recognized what history has since come to acknowledge: that his legacy to us is due more to his thought than to his life.

He was born in the city of Clermont-Ferrard, in the south-central region of Auvergne, in 1623. His father was a government official, mostly in the royal court system, who at death (in 1651) left a comfortable sum to his one son and two daughters. In 1631 the father moved to Paris and later took up a post as tax assessor in Rouen, a tedious job that required long hours of dreary number-crunching. Seeing these grinding labors of his father, son Blaise struck upon the idea of building him a computer, the first ever invented and which is still on display in Paris at the *Conservatoire des Arts et Métiers.*

This remarkable achievement had already been foreshadowed by an event recounted by his older sister Gilberte. Blaise's father had assumed the entire responsibility for his son's education and had forbidden the boy to study or read geometry until he had first mastered Latin and Greek. But one day the father happened to come upon his precocious twelve-year-old, with charcoal and scrap paper on the floor, working out, totally untutored, Euclid's geometry up to the thirty-second proposition. Whether strictly true or merely *bien trouvé,* the story points to Pascal's universally acknowledged mathematical genius. In 1639, for example, at the age of sixteen, he wrote an essay on conic sections; and toward the end of his life he laid the foundations of the infinitesimal calculus, integral calculus, and the calculus of probabilities in a work that inspired Newton and Leibniz, more or less simultaneously and more or less independently of each other, to bring the development of calculus to where it is today. (Newton and Leibniz later got into a nasty dispute about who first discovered calculus, time that would have been better spent acknowledging their mutual debt to Pascal.)

The accidents of Pascal's biography also illuminate, at least partly, his famous attack on those sworn enemies of Jansenist theology, the Jesuit moralists, who were not loath to point out how Jansenism bore certain affinities with French Huguenot Calvinism. Now the great center of Jansenist theology and spirituality at that time was the convent of Port-Royal, where Pascal's younger sister Jacqueline had entered and which the Jesuits eventually prevailed upon an aging King Louis XIV to close once Popes Innocent X, Alexander VII, and Clement XI had successively declared Jansenism a heresy. Although the convent only closed after Pascal's death, persecution of anyone associated with Port-Royal had already begun in his lifetime. Needless to say, the primary victims of this highhanded example of ecclesiastical *Machtpolitik* were not the Jansenist theologians (all male) but a convent of pious women who cared little for the subtleties of tractates on grace but who knew their Jansenist spiritual directors to be holy men. Such considerations meant nothing to an absolutist king and his Jesuit confessors, however, and royal persecution of the convent remained relentless, a campaign that made Pascal an enemy of the Jesuits for the rest of his life.

An essay treating Pascal's wider millennial significance cannot discuss in any detail the nature of his rather arcane dispute with the moral theologians of the Society of Jesus. But of his *Provincial Letters,* the collection of polemical tracts that had been provoked by the dispute, the last word should perhaps be given to the balanced judgment of T. S. Eliot: "He undoubtedly abused the art of quotation, as a polemical writer can hardly help but do; but there were abuses for him to abuse." Eliot is not excusing Pascal's ferocity here, even in the act of admitting that his targets deserved criticism. Quite the contrary, Eliot gets exactly the right balance when he says that "as polemic [these letters] are surpassed by none, not by Demosthenes, or Cicero, or Swift. [But] they have the limitation of all polemic and forensic: they persuade, they seduce, they are unfair."

Of course if this were all there was to Pascal, he would be merely the curiosity of the specialist, the fit subject of research for the historian of mathematics or the scholar of Counter-Reformation theology in France. But Pascal is more, much more. What makes him so utterly remarkable, indeed so remarkably *modern,* is the fact that he became the first Christian apologist both to absorb the Cartesian apotheosis of reason and to fight against its acidic effects, often using Descartes' own principles. In fact, so thoroughly did Pascal absorb the Cartesian outlook that from time to time one will find a philosophy textbook that classifies Pascal as the first and most influential member of the Cartesian school—a categorization which would certainly have come as a surprise to Pascal himself, most of whose references to Descartes in the jottings that make up the *Pensées* are derogatory. (Two examples: "Descartes useless and uncertain." "Write against those who probe science too deeply. Descartes.")

But perhaps there is a certain justice in this un-

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helpful pigeonholing of Pascal as a Cartesian, especially when one considers his essay "The Spirit of Geometry and the Art of Persuasion." Here more than elsewhere he strikes the Cartesian note, as when he suggests that "logic has perhaps borrowed the rules of geometry without understanding their force." As with Descartes, and Spinoza after him, the ideal rational method for Pascal is what he calls the "geometrical" method, using mathematical rules of inference from accepted or self-evident axioms. Pascal means to set his purely mathematical form of inference over against the logical method of Aristotle, especially as it had been developed and extended by the medieval schoolmen. In this he is clearly presuming, as did Descartes, that medieval logic and "geometry" (in his sense) somehow conflict, to the detriment of all prior logic.

The two Frenchmen also share a noticeable dualism about the constitution of the human person, and here perhaps most of all we discover how much Descartes and Pascal have in common. Both men see human beings as a riddling composition of juxtaposed, antithetical essences (body and mind, flesh and spirit, extension and thinking), a dualism which in Pascal comes through most particularly in his famous definition of man as a "thinking reed." Both Descartes and Pascal, as true early moderns standing on the threshold of imminent discoveries of the universe's immensity from ever-improving telescopes, suspect the vast extension of space; but as true dualists (dualists who, moreover, give precedence to the mind) they also know that mind or consciousness can somehow possess and encompass that space in the very act of knowing it.

Pascal differs from Descartes' rather bloodless rationalism, however, in the explicitly theological implications he will try to draw from this anthropological dualism. He is alert, as Descartes rarely is, to the religious and ethical implications of this dualism of mind and body:

> *Thinking reed.* It is not in space that I must look for my dignity, but in the organization of my thoughts. *I shall have no advantage in owning estates.* Through space the universe grasps and engulfs me like a pinpoint; but through thought I can grasp it. . . . All our dignity consists, therefore, of thought. It is from there that we must be lifted up and not from space and time, which we could never fill. So let us work on thinking well. That is the principle of morality.

No doubt this passage will strike most readers as a remarkable summary of Cartesian metaphysics, especially in its reliance on the famous distinction between the nonspatial "thinking thing" (mind) and the space-occupying "extended thing" (body). But even here we can pick up the characteristic tone of the Pascalian stress on morality: far from trying à la Descartes to take this initial dualism as the basis on which to build a rickety philosophical superstructure, Pascal wants to see in the baffling juxtaposition of these two irreconcilable substances the very pathos of human existence itself. "Man's nature is entirely natural, *wholly animal*," he concedes. "There is nothing that cannot be made natural." But that is also why, he says, "there is nothing that cannot be lost."

Nothing, then, is exempt from the death sentence of nature, not even knowledge, not even spirit—which is why, as Pascal says, "man's true nature, his true good and true virtue, and true religion cannot be known separately." In other words, to admit the essential animality of human nature, *right through to the soul*, becomes for Pascal the beginning of rational wisdom. Indeed, morality begins with this admission: not in a flight from nature but in a recognition of its misery and corruption. (Note that Pascal's first conclusion from his mind/body dualism is not epistemological, but moral: there is no point in owning vast "spatial" estates, he says above, precisely because the soul is nonspatial.)

In fact few thinkers, when read carefully, would seem less Cartesian than Pascal, even in his philosophy of science, which at first glance seems so Cartesian, with its praise of the "geometrical" mind. Actually, for all his brilliance as a mathematician and despite his awe before the geometrical method, Pascal gives a much more ringing defense of the empirical method than any of the British empiricists managed to do, and he certainly grants to the senses a much larger role than any of his fellow Continental Rationalists could muster. Today we can see that the British Empiricists went too far and misinterpreted rationality as a mere generalization of sensation, while the Continental Rationalists went to the other extreme because they could not grant the exalted title "knowledge" to any but rational truths. But Pascal, anticipating the errors of both schools and sounding almost like a disciple of W. V. Quine *avant la lettre*, was able to balance rational and empirical, *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning with a remarkably contemporary note. "When we say that the diamond is the hardest of all bodies," he observes in his fragmentary *Treatise on the Vacuum*, "we mean of all bodies with which *we* are acquainted. We cannot and ought not to include those bodies of which we are entirely ignorant. . . . For in all matters in which proof consists in experiences and not in demonstrations, one cannot make any universal assertion save by general enumeration of all the parts and of all the different cases."

This principle might seem obvious today, but its application had an unsettling effect on the mind of contemporary natural philosophers trained in medieval scholastic physics. In 1648 Pascal's brother-in-law carried a barometer up a mountain and observed

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how the level of mercury changed with the height of the mountain. Pascal then repeated the experiment by checking the mercury levels at various heights inside a Parisian church tower, the results of which prompted him to exclaim: "Nature has no abhorrence of a vacuum, she makes no effort to avoid it. . . . Due to their lack of knowledge of this phenomenon, people have invented a wholly imaginary horror of a vacuum." As noted philosopher of science Richard H. Popkin rightly observes: "Combining his ingeniously derived experimental data with a clear analysis of the possible explanatory hypotheses, Pascal arrived at one of the major achievements of seventeenth-century science."

But Pascal is even more noticeably anti-Cartesian in his concern for the Christian religion. Descartes famously loathed theological disputes and avoided their entanglements whenever possible. Pascal, as his acrimonious debates with the Jesuits attest, entered the fray of theological infighting with startling gusto and vehemence. But what most of his contemporaries, both friend and foe, failed during his lifetime to see about his motivation emerged only after his death, when his younger sister gathered together the shards and *disjecta membra* of his notes for a projected work of apologetics and published them in the form we know today as the *Pensées*.

From this remarkable work we now realize that Pascal saw himself, above all, as Christ's apologete and defender against Christianity's rationalist scoffers (whereas Descartes in contrast knew himself primarily, indeed only, as a scientist and philosopher). No doubt Pascal always remained heavily indebted to Descartes' dualism of mind and matter, but in his apologetics for Christianity he transforms Cartesian dualism into merely one aspect of a much deeper and more central dualism: not between spirit and matter but between God's holiness and human misery, not between soul and body but between God's infinity and man's sin. Christ came to heal these more agonizing divisions—divisions rooted not in incompatible metaphysical essences but in the pathos of the enfleshed soul trapped in sin. The Incarnation thus becomes a balm applied to man's riven soul, torn not so much between spirit and flesh as between despair and pride.

> [The Christian religion] teaches men both these truths: that there is a God of whom we are capable, and that a corruption in our nature makes us unworthy of Him. It is equally important for us to know both these points; for it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his own wretchedness, and to know his wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer who can cure him of it. Knowledge of only one of these points leads either to the arrogance of the philosophers, who have known God and not their own wretchedness, or to the despair of the atheists, who know their wretchedness without knowing the Redeemer.

We can see from these remarks that for Pascal Descartes' dualism is missing a crucial element: he has failed to provide an analysis of the *moral* dangers to which the human spirit is prone precisely because of its capacity for an infinite reach to the very ends of the universe. Pascal openly affirms with Descartes that our capacity to know the universe makes us masters, in some paradoxical sense, of the universe we conceive. But our capacity to "grasp" the universe and transform it into a mental construct of our knowing powers remains both paradox and pathos: we always accomplish these acts of knowing as puny, pathetic, and vulnerable bodies, whose corruption eventually leads to death.

This knowing mind, however, would rather remain enamored of its cognitive powers than acknowledge that this knowing power is an organic function of the brain. (Philosopher John Searle calls the brain "cognitive meat," which nicely captures in the minor key of neuroscience Pascal's more metaphysical definition in the major key of man as a "thinking reed.") Fearing the inevitable dissolution of its powers, the mind hides from itself the reality of its own insignificance. Second only to cognition itself, the most notable fact of the human mind lies in its tendency to forget the realities of its corruption and death.

Hence the central temptation of man is always pride. (Thus did the Serpent tempt Adam and Eve.) For Pascal, pride is a deeply functional sin: it works to help us forget. The mind shrinks from recognizing its status as a thinking reed by hiding under a carapace of pride. Characteristically, Descartes failed to notice this pathos; a missing element that, like the non-barking dog that became the decisive clue in the Sherlock Holmes story, tells us why Cartesian philosophy is more culprit than detective, more likely, that is, to lead us astray than to bring us to the truth.

But despite a few stray remarks in the *Pensées* that attack Descartes, Pascal's intent there is not, fundamentally, polemical. Throughout this fascinating book of almost random observations the reader soon picks up the author's driving motivation. Pascal above all wants to explain to his post-Cartesian contemporaries how the pathos of human nature has its own "balm in Gilead," a healing ointment in Jesus Christ, who is the very divine incarnation of these human oppositions. But of course Jesus Christ can only be accepted *as* Christ (the "anointed one") if one first admits that human nature needs His healing balm. Christ's coming on earth thus has the odd effect of eliciting hate precisely because His presence in history will reopen wounds that our distracted culture thought had been healed not by His balm but

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by the iodine of hyperactivity.

No wonder, then, that modernity since the Enlightenment has taken scandal in Jesus Christ. Even inside our own culture, which is often called "post"-modern because of its self-image of being more accommodating to local traditions and intercultural understanding than was Enlightened modernity, Christianity still is made to feel something like the bastard son who shows up uninvited at the annual family picnic. Inside all the talk about multiculturalism, contemporary culture often balks at including Christianity in its "gorgeous mosaic." This uneasiness has sometimes been dubbed the "ABC Rule," meaning "anything but Christianity." Undoubtedly Pascal would amend that to mean "anyone but Christ," for at root that is where the scandal lies. Christianity's scandal is not just itself (though it is that as well, which is no doubt why the Pope wants the Church formally to repent of her institutional sins); its *real* scandal is Jesus Christ. And *He* is the stumbling block precisely because to accept Him is first of all to admit one's hopelessness without Him. Pride and life in Christ are inherently incompatible.

> Pride tells us we can know God without Jesus Christ, in effect that we can communicate with God without a mediator. But this only means that we are communicating with a God who is the [prideful] result that comes from being known without a mediator. Whereas those who have known God through a mediator know their own wretchedness. Not only is it impossible to know God without Jesus Christ, it is also useless. . . . [For] knowing God without knowing our wretchedness leads to pride. Knowing our wretchedness without knowing God leads to despair. Knowing Jesus Christ is the middle course, because in Him we find both God and our wretchedness.

Because he wants the Incarnation to be a cure appropriate to the disease and because the death of Christ on the cross is indeed a most radical cure, implying a serious illness, Pascal is usually categorized as a "pessimistic" thinker—he wants his readers to see how far advanced the disease infecting them really is. And certainly he can be unsparing in his portrayal of the fleshly corruption and frail constitution of that "bruised and crushed reed" that is the human body. No doubt he could describe the corruption of the flesh so well partly because his own health was so appallingly bad, perhaps the worst of any Christian mystic with the exception of Teresa of Ávila and Adrienne von Speyr. (In fact, at his autopsy it was discovered that the fontanel—the "soft spot" on an infant's skull—had never been closed over in Pascal's case by the formation of skull bone, so that Pascal lived his entire life with an unclosed cranium, which certainly provides a weird intensity to his definition of man as a "thinking reed.") But in depicting human wretchedness Pascal never wallows in scenes of grim despair but simply faces the human condition as it is, universally. In fact for Pascal, as for Dostoevsky later, the real issue comes down not to the sheer immensity of human suffering but more crucially to the fact that human suffering only has to occur *once* for the issue of man's predicament to be raised.

But Dostoevsky (or at least his fictional character Ivan Karamazov) takes the fact of just one child suffering and on that basis assumes the role of being humanity's "prosecuting attorney," as it were, charging God to justify Himself as God in the face of that one moment of evil. Pascal lived well before this style of what is often called "protest atheism," but if he were transported to Ivan Karamazov's celestial courtroom as "attorney for the defense," as it were, he would surely turn the argument around and put the challenge to the whole courtroom: anyone who would presume to act as *spectator* to this suffering (as judge and jury must do in order to fulfill their roles) has a challenge to face too. What Pascal would say, in other words, is that as long as we take the spectator's part and view human suffering from the outside, then, no matter how happy our circumstances are at the moment, we must know ourselves fundamentally as wretched beings. "Imagine a number of men in chains, all under sentence of death," he would say to the courtroom as he did in the *Pensées*, "some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others; those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair await their turn. This is an image of the human condition."

Especially in this era of terrorists parading their hostages in front of the world's television screens, or hijackers holding a pistol to the head of an airline pilot for all the world to behold, or high school students hiding under cafeteria tables while their friends are being murdered by their own peers, we immediately recognize the truth of what Pascal is saying. But Pascal does not intend to force his readers to wallow in this misery. Rather, his depiction of the human condition is meant only to create the first opening through which we hear God's response to that misery. Such a response, like the answer of the Almighty to Job, will be no courtroom defense speech. Jansenist that he was, Pascal firmly believed that "God owes us nothing," and so Dostoevsky's formulation would have been inconceivable to him. And yet, however inadequate it might be in the eyes of the "protest atheist" (who, as a spectator of suffering, must perforce judge God from the outside), God's answer is not nothing. But that answer cannot even be heard if we do not admit the realities of the human condition in all their bleakness. Even as spectators, we suffer what we are forced to see. Television screens force us to become spectators of appalling suffering,

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but the situation they reveal is rooted in everyone's nature. There is no escape from its pathos, only balm for our wounds—if we are willing to accept the astringency of the ointment.

Of course, not many want that kind of painful healing, making it well-nigh inevitable that we will avail ourselves of distractions from our woes. Few words, in fact, are more crucial to Pascal than *divertissement*, usually translated as "diversion" or "distraction." One of Pascal's most famous observations, found in nearly every anthology of quotations, holds that "all the misfortunes of men derive from one single thing, their inability to remain at repose in a room." Far from being merely the obiter dictum of a dry cynic, Pascal's remark actually forms the opening gambit of his Christian apologetics, for he knows that "being unable to cure death, wretchedness, and ignorance," and being not too fond of the medicine of Christ on offer either, "men have decided, in order to be happy, not to think about such things." "Pessimist" that he is, however, Pascal refuses to let us evade God's answer to our plight just because we would rather not advert to our distress in the first place. "That is why men are so fond of hustle and bustle," he says. "That is why prison is such a fearful punishment; that is why the pleasures of solitude are so incomprehensible."

This craving for distraction is so overriding and exigent that for Pascal it actually constitutes the driving force of ambition. In one sharply worded paragraph in the *Pensées*, he asserts that the main joy of being a king is the opportunity it affords for endless distraction, since courtiers are continually trying to keep the king's mind off his mortality and provide him every kind of pleasure. "A king is surrounded by people whose only thought is to divert him so that he might be kept from thinking about himself, because, king though he is, he becomes unhappy as soon as he thinks about himself."

But what applies to the ambitions of a king applies equally well to the motivations of all men. We crave distractions because we do not want to face the realities of the human condition. And because we are unwilling to admit our despair, we perforce cannot face the thought of applying the appropriate balm to heal these unacknowledged wounds. Consequently we hurl ourselves into an endless round of diversions, jobs, hobbies, etc., all to avoid our nature as thinking reeds:

> Man is obviously made for thinking. Therein lies all his dignity and his merit; and his whole duty is to think as he ought. Now the order of thought is to begin with ourselves, and with our Author and our end. But what does the world think about? Never about that, but about dancing, playing the lute, singing, writing verse, jousting and fighting, becoming a king, without ever thinking what it means to be a king or to be a man.

Like Kierkegaard and Heidegger after him, Pascal was an acute student of boredom, and saw in this phenomenon (actually rather puzzling when one thinks about it) the clue to the very pathos of the human condition. Generally speaking, says Pascal, "we think either of present woes or of threatened miseries." But moments occur in almost everyone's experience when life reaches a temporary pause of homeostasis, when we feel quite safe on every side, when bad health does not threaten, when bill collectors are not baying at the door, when rush-hour traffic is light and the weather pleasant. But precisely at such moments "boredom on its own account emerges from the depths of our hearts, where it is naturally rooted, and poisons our whole mind." Not just the king craves diversion. So terrified are we of boredom that the king's ambition is our own.

I have called Pascal "the first modern Christian" because, among other reasons, our civilization, in contrast to all other past civilizations, gets its very identity from the sheer range of distractions that have now been made available to us, from hundreds of channels on cable TV to over a thousand video cassettes on the shelf of any self-respecting video rental agency to the millions of websites on the Internet, group activities of every sort imaginable, aerobics classes, talk-show radio on the air twenty-four hours a day, and so on. As the literary journalist Norman Cousins observed in his book *Human Options*:

> Our own age is not likely to be distinguished in history for the large numbers of people who insisted on finding the time to think. Plainly, this is not the Age of Meditative Man. . . . Substitutes for repose are a billion dollar business. Almost daily, new antidotes for contemplation spring into being and leap out from store counters. Silence, already the world's most critical shortage, is in danger of becoming a nasty word. Modern man may or may not be obsolete, but he is certainly wired for sound and he twitches as naturally as he breathes.

Of course no one denies the legitimate need for entertainment or the role that diversion plays in generating demand for the works of art that have become the glory of our species. Often life achieves its goal of testifying to its own goodness as worth living when a human being is able to enjoy the highest benefits of culture. I personally count myself most glad to be alive when I am enjoying a good meal with a friend, listening to Mozart in the privacy of my room, or reading a good book. Nor, despite his seeming Jansenist severity, would Pascal contemn such pleasures. Even he, the least therapeutic writer imagina-

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ble, admits that diversions can help to heal the beset soul ("that is why the man who lost his only son a few months ago and who was so troubled and oppressed this morning by lawsuits and quarrels is for the moment [because of a fleeting diversion] not thinking about it").

But our extraordinary obsession with entertainment and distraction constitutes perhaps *the* hallmark of our civilization in contrast to past cultures. From the time the clock radio goes off in the morning to the late-night talk shows, the average denizen of contemporary culture need never be alone, encounter silence, or have to listen to the voice within. As Pascal says: "We run heedlessly into the abyss after putting something in front of us to keep from seeing the precipice." Or as the French poet Paul Claudel says, speaking of the New Testament's Book of Revelation: "What if, beneath all this revelry and group cheer, there were something seething under our feet?"

To the journalistic mind, all this gloom-and-doom apologetic is going to sound like the grim Calvinist sermons in *The Scarlet Letter* that poured forth from the tormented pulpit of the aptly named Rev. Mr. Arthur Dimmesdale. Schooled by the plot of this *Urmyth* of American Protestantism, the same journalistic mind will inevitably ask: What could be more life-denying than this constant dwelling on the dire straits of the human condition? And since Pascal owes so much to Calvinist doctrines of grace, is he not really the Catholic equivalent of the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale?

No. Rather, the self-satisfied glee of the professional scoffer—the kind of opinion-monger who takes satisfaction in the fall of Jimmy Swaggart, Jim and Tammy Bakker, or any other easy target—comes from a different motivation than a resentment against a supposedly life-denying Calvinist or Jansenist Christianity. Underneath the smug cluck-clucking at the fall of a Christian aiming for sanctity, Pascal will detect the "ABC rule" working its effect:

> *Order.* Men despise religion. They hate it and are afraid it may be true. The cure for this is first to show that religion is not contrary to reason, but worthy of reverence and respect. Next, make it attractive, make good men wish it were true, and then show that it is. Worthy of reverence because it really understands human nature. Attractive because it promises true good.

Of course, nothing could be further from Pascal's intention than to sweep all religions under the universal rubric of human religiosity and see them merely as aspects of one global "search for meaning." Enlightenment thinkers, who hoped to find a basis for international comity beyond the particularity of culture and religion, saw the modern pluriformity of religions as a problem. So too have postmodern thinkers, with their opposite privileging of the particular culture over against an allegedly "hegemonic" universal culture. Pascal, however, takes the multiplicity of religions to be a way of proving the truth of Christianity. Its very particularity, for Pascal, dramatically indicates its transcendental truth: "On the fact that the Christian religion is not unique: Far from being a reason for believing it not to be the true religion, it is on the contrary what proves it to be so."

Perhaps no sentence that came from Pascal's pen better encapsulates what makes him so modern as this apparent paradox. Nothing so beset, even fixated, the Enlightened mind of Pascal's time and in the century to follow than what has become known as the "scandal of particularity." If God's will to save is universal, how can it matter what one believes in particular? What difference does it make what religion one belongs to or believes in, since—as one is constantly hearing on the lips of nearly every American—"it's all the same God anyway"?

Second only to Dante, Pascal is Europe's most politically incorrect writer. He dares to raise the unmentionable topic of truth in religion, and even called one of the sections of his *Pensées* "Nature Is Corrupt: On the Falseness of Other Religions." In contrast to most reflection on the problem of world religions in today's academy, Pascal sees the "problem" as in fact essential for the truth of the Christian message:

> *That God wanted to be hidden.* If there were only one religion, God would be clearly manifest. If there were martyrs only in our religion, the same. God being therefore hidden, any religion which does not say that God is hidden is not true. And any religion which does not give us the reason why does not enlighten. Ours does all this. . . . If there were no obscurity man would not feel his corruption: if there were no light man could not hope for a cure. Thus it is not only right but useful that God should be partly concealed and partly revealed, since it is equally dangerous for man to know God without knowing his wretchedness as to know his own wretchedness without knowing God. "Truly God is hidden with you" (Isaiah 45:15).

But of course the key to finding this light is to search for it, and this once more brings us to the central difficulty: do we *want* the light of the truth? "Truth is so obscured nowadays and lies so well established that unless we love the truth we shall never recognize it."

So there are good reasons for Christianity to stress not only its uniqueness (every religion is unique in some way) but its inherent truth. Nothing is more awkward in our ecumenical age than for a religion to stress its possession of the truth. But Pascal would say to Christians that unless it is confident that it possesses the truth, Christianity will not have the confi-

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dence that it can apply the only salve that can heal the real wounds of humanity. As the former Marxist Leszek Kolakowski put it in his defense of Pascal:

> There are reasons why we need Christianity, but not just any kind of Christianity. We do not need a Christianity that makes political revolution, that rushes to cooperate with so-called sexual liberation, that approves our concupiscence or praises our violence. There are enough forces in the world to do all these things without the aid of Christianity. We need a Christianity that will help us to move beyond the immediate pressures of life, that gives us insight *into the basic limits of the human condition* and the capacity to accept them, a Christianity that teaches us the simple truth that there is not only a tomorrow but a day after tomorrow as well, and that the difference between success and failure is rarely distinguishable.

But even this formulation puts the matter too weakly (one detects in Kolakowski's praise of Pascal the same weakness that has made him so diffident toward doctrinal Christianity throughout his published career). Far better perhaps is the judgment of T. S. Eliot, who to my mind has summed up Pascal's achievement best of all; and, as befits Pascal himself, he has done so in one sentence of unsurpassed accuracy and concision: "I can think of no Christian writer, not Newman even, more to be commended than Pascal to those who doubt, but who have the mind to conceive, and the sensibility to feel, the disorder, the futility, the meaninglessness, the mystery of life and suffering, and who can only find peace through a satisfaction of the whole being."

Pascal's was a remarkable achievement, made even more remarkable by one—often overlooked—detail: he died at the age of thirty-nine. FT

Figures in Mist

Dusk. Yellow light and white
from the different streetlights
one with gold glass smashed
shines porcelain glare on every blade
where the bulb hits—the other coldly, goldly casts
over the scene a jaundiced glance
and the Tae Kwon Do practitioners on the grass
exchange mock body blows to pressure points,
nerve clusters—a black belt first dan of sixty odd
told my brother vampires lived, sucked human beings' blood;
some men break boards, some make of their mind
an adze honed on a lathe like a utensil for the marketing
as kitchenware; perhaps the choice
is absent, only men as darkness falls
on Sunday night exchanging body blows
till they can't see the night bring small bats out
from yellow darkness and they fly like hearts
seeking fresh hot life in the quiet blue black grass
—and I wonder—do men become
what they desire, practicing at dusk
for full bright daylight or only perspire
the hours till day makes what it wants of us
and floods the grass with broken white cup shards of light?
None left on the grass, dark has made the park
a realm of swift run beacons from passed cars
and unreliable white and golden glow
from the partly vandalized lamps.

Atar Hadari

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Preachers Without Poetry

Alan Jacobs

AMERICAN SERMONS: THE PILGRIMS TO MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. Edited by MICHAEL WARNER. *Library of America. 939 pp. $40.*

Most of us are familiar with the story of the "two cultures," as C. P. Snow called it, or, in Isaiah Berlin's terms, "the divorce between the sciences and the humanities." When John Milton was born, in 1609, it was still possible to "know everything"—that is, to be competent in the whole range of available knowledge. But by the time Milton died, in 1674, the young Isaac Newton was already doing work in optics and physics so specialized and detailed that it would make such general competence impossible, and Europe's young scholars began to be confronted with a choice of intellectual paths—a choice that we still have to make today, though by now that simple fork in the road of learning has led to the copious tangled bronchi of the modern university, a place in which even denizens of a particular department can speak languages incomprehensible to one another.

Right though we have been to focus our attention on this fragmentation of culture—with both its benefits and its costs—it has perhaps led us to neglect another extremely important "divorce," another bifurcation of a once-unified culture. I refer to the divorce between literature and theology. Oddly enough, this parting of the ways occurred at the same time as the other one: the seventeenth century in England would begin with a series of figures—John Donne, George Herbert, Lancelot Andrewes—in whom literary excellence and theological acuity would be comfortably blended. It was also an age in which certain communal projects yoking theology and literature that had begun in the previous century would find their culmination: the Authorized Version of the Bible in 1611, the last major redaction of the Book of Common Prayer in 1660. In this period of English history—and one could adduce similar examples from elsewhere in Europe—the men of letters and the men of God were the same men, thanks largely to the Protestant Reformers' embrace of much of the learning retrieved by the Renaissance humanists. (In this development some of the second-generation reformers were more important than even Luther and Calvin: Philipp Melanchthon's role in linking classical literary culture with Protestant theology has been much neglected.)

In such a context it is not surprising that the great models of prose style in the vernacular languages would be theological writings. From the sixteenth-century treatises of Calvin in French, Luther in German, and Thomas More in English all the way through to Milton's political pamphlets and Pascal's *Provincial Letters* (1656), theologians more than anyone else shaped European notions of stylistic excellence. This fact has not often enough been noted, but the blame for such neglect should not fall primarily on the secularization of the European intelligentsia. Rather, the chief culprit has been the Romantics' powerful redefinitions of *belles lettres*, which confined the literary to what they called works of "imagination"—imagination being defined in such a way as to exclude almost all polemical or discursive or fact-based writings, thus leaving poetry, fiction, and drama alone to populate the world of what was now, increasingly, called "literature."

Strangely enough, it is the recent movement in university English departments from literary study (as defined by the Romantics) to "cultural studies" that has enabled a recovery of the literary significance of theological writings. The same movement has also led to a renaissance in the study of American literature, many of whose major writers (including Emerson, Thoreau, and almost everyone before the nineteenth century) have never fit into the Romantic

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literary categories. In light of these developments, it is not altogether surprising that the Library of America—a publishing program which, in its own self-description, is "dedicated to preserving America's best and most significant writing"—would now be moving toward fuller representation of certain "non-literary" masterpieces of literature. Not that the Library wasn't aware of such works from the beginning: its first publications included not only the work of Emerson and Thoreau but also the historical writings of Francis Parkman and Henry Adams. But one senses a further expansion of range in some of its most recent efforts: a two-volume collection called *Reporting Vietnam* and the book at hand, a fascinating and ambitious collection of *American Sermons.*

But, however salutary this more expansive definition of literature may be in general, the claiming of these sermons as monuments of American literature is not a simple matter. Complex forces are at work here, and they require some investigation. Were these sermons to enter, or reenter, the canon of American literature, something would be gained; but a less definable something would be lost as well.

Michael Warner of Rutgers University has selected for this volume fifty-eight sermons by fifty-three different preachers. Warner is in some respects an ideal choice to do this job: a major figure in American Studies, he was also, in a phrase he once used in an autobiographical essay, a "teenage Pentecostalist" who later graduated from Oral Roberts University. That was, needless to say, before he became what he calls a "queer atheist intellectual," indeed a founder of what has come to be called Queer Theory. But no hint of his current orientations can be found in his work here, which is if anything too conservative, befitting a staid publication program like the Library of America.

Warner's selections can be analyzed and categorized in a number of ways, ways which collectively tell a very familiar story about American religious history. Of the fifty-three preachers represented, forty-seven are white, six black or of mixed race; fifty-one are men, two women; forty-five are Christian, four Unitarian, three Jewish, and one Mormon (Joseph Smith himself). Of the forty-five Christians, only two are Roman Catholic, only one Methodist, one Baptist. For obvious historical reasons, Puritan Calvinists rule the denominational competition, and half of the preachers appearing here, including the first sixteen, are from New England, though not one who lived in the twentieth century. The sermons of our century included here were preached by people born in South Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey (Hoboken), New York (New York City and Buffalo), Iowa, Florida, Missouri, Mississippi, Illinois, and Georgia—thus offering a nice illustration of the movement of American Christianity south and west, though not too far west. They also exemplify the proliferation of denominations, with their greatly varying theological and spiritual emphases. (Also represented among modern preachers are Paul Tillich, born in Prussia, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, originally of Warsaw, and Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, from Lithuania.)

One more classificatory scheme may be illuminating here. The sermons from the seventeenth century average seventeen pages each; those of the eighteenth century average twenty-two pages. In the nineteenth century the page count descends to twelve per sermon, and in the twentieth to a mere nine. (Some sermons in every period are reprinted only in part, but such excerpting is more common in the early ones.) This change may well indicate the constriction of the American attention span, but it certainly reflects a change in the place of the sermon in American Christian life.

As Harry Stout has so capably demonstrated in *The New England Soul* (1986), in Puritan New England the homily was central not only to the spiritual education of the already pious congregation, but also to the communal life of the town or village. The Sunday morning sermon would typically last an hour or more—often much more—and would be followed by another in the afternoon, plus, in towns like Boston, a more scholarly "lecture" sermon given in midweek. By contrast, when contemporary Americans think of sermons, what first comes to mind is the evangelistic message—a homiletic genre which, following the enormously influential example of D. L. Moody, emphasizes brief exhortation rather than detailed exposition, and is situated in a larger context of music and worship than the old Puritan congregational sermon. Indeed, Moody always worked hand in hand with the singer and hymn-writer Ira Sankey to weave what would now be called a multimedia experience: the saving of souls was to be effected by a complex aesthetic presentation of which the sermon was only a part—though in one sense the key part, in that it pressed upon the audience the need not just to experience but actively to respond. One of the oddities of the modern world is that conservative Protestantism created and nourished an evangelistic enterprise in which the sermon was restored to a place in the worship service rather analogous to the place it held in sixteenth-century Anglican worship—just the tradition the fundamentalists' Puritan ancestors had determined to escape.

Let's look further into this history. Warner points out (in a brief concluding "Note on the Sermon Form") that Puritan homiletic culture arose in direct opposition to standard Anglican practice in sixteenth-century England, which mandated only four sermons a year and suggested that they be read from the approved Book of Homilies which accompanied the Book of Common Prayer. Seventy years later, the high-church Archbishop of Canterbury,

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William Laud, would work to confine sermons to instruction in the catechism.

But between these periods matters were rather different. From the learned and intricate, yet sometimes brilliant, expository preaching of Lancelot Andrewes to the unabashedly flamboyant speculations of John Donne—whom T. S. Eliot, who came greatly to prefer Andrewes, would scornfully call "the Reverend Billy Sunday of his day, the flesh-creeper, the sorcerer of emotional orgy"—Jacobean England saw a great flowering of the homiletic art. In other words, preaching came to or near the forefront of Anglican worship, at least in London, just at the time that the dissenting or schismatic Puritans were leaving for America.

You might expect that the Pilgrims would borrow the rhetorical flair and literary fire of these new Anglican divines. Yet they did not, or not exactly. Warner is right to say, in an interview that the Library of America included with my review copy of the book, that American preaching's "best examples contain some of the most powerful language we have produced." But it is important to note that the most carefully crafted and literate of the sermons that Warner has collected arise from a tradition that explicitly rejected both the terrific erudition of Andrewes and the poetic flights of Donne. Indeed, Warner inadvertently points this out when he quotes, in the "Note" already mentioned, the guidelines for preachers articulated in William Perkins' definitive—for Puritans, anyway—*Art of Prophesying* (1592). According to Perkins, the preacher's task is to do four things:

1. To reade the Text distinctly out of the Canonicall Scriptures.
2. To give the sense and understanding of it being read, by the Scripture itself.
3. To collect a few and profitable points of doctrine out of the naturall sense.
4. To apply (if he have the gift) the doctrines rightly collected, to the life and manners of men in a simple and plaine speech.

(This fourfold division could be simplified—as for example in Warner's selection from John Cotton's "The Life of Faith"—into "Doctrine" and "Use.") The first three requirements would have placed intolerable constraints on Donne, who reveled in imitating the God whom he believed to be "a metaphorical God," while the last would have thwarted Andrewes' multilingual festival. Perkins' principles greatly restrict the available linguistic resources of the Puritan preacher.

To be sure, Perkins' fourth point makes room for words of warning or exhortation vividly expressed, but the anti-Anglican context of the early Puritans seems to have prevented most of them from pursuing these possibilities very far. Indeed, it would be almost a hundred and fifty years after Perkins that Jonathan Edwards would exercise this implicit freedom in the crafting of his most famous sermon—and one of the definitive productions of the first Great Awakening—"Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." (This is perhaps as good a time as any to note that Edwards is, beyond any question, the most important American writer not to have his own volume in the Library of America series.) Indeed, in his whole approach to preaching Edwards would come to emphasize the importance of Perkins' fourth point: it was certainly necessary for Scripture to be exegeted and exposited accurately, but, as he once said, "Our people do not so much need to have their heads stored, as to have their hearts touched; and they stand in the greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this." Though many would decry him and other pastoral participants in the Awakening for their indulgence of excessive emotions, Edwards remained faithful to this vision, and would produce what may be the most brilliant and philosophically rich defense ever given of the proper role of emotion in the moral and spiritual life, the *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* of 1746.

Nevertheless, as is well known, Edwards eschewed the usual tricks and resources of the orator in delivering even so explosive a sermon as "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God." As a witness recorded, though Edwards spoke in a quiet and level, even monotonous, voice, and made almost no gestures, rarely lifting his head to look at his congregation, nevertheless "there was such a breathing of distress, and weeping, that the preacher was obliged to speak to the people and desire silence, that he might be heard." It is interesting to reflect that, while philosophers have traditionally linked literature and rhetoric as sister arts which lack the intellectual rigor and explicit foundations of the dialectic, Edwards would exploit every possible literary device yet scorn his era's ideals of eloquence. It is possible, of course, to argue that Edwards was actually being very attentive to the rhetorical dimensions of his preaching by speaking such wild and violent words in a quiet and monotonous voice; but the eyewitnesses seem not to have thought that he was striving for effect. If we do not recognize this distinction we deprive ourselves of valuable terms with which to evaluate speakers—or else we have to replace the terms we have foregone with others. To paraphrase Orwell, all speeches may be rhetorical, but some are more rhetorical than others.

As is also well known, Edwards' successors, especially among the evangelists of the last century-and-a-half, would not share his restraint; indeed, they considered the kind of response Edwards elicited as the pearl of great price which they would spare no effort or machination to achieve. We are only partly right to deplore this tendency. It is necessary to remember that Edwards was preaching to a congregation by our standards remarkably learned in Chris-

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tian theology: they had been listening to sermons like his for some time ("Sinners" was part of the "application" phase of Perkins' scheme, and had been prepared for by more strictly expository preaching). D. L. Moody, Billy Sunday, and Billy Graham could count on no such preparatory knowledge, and were therefore limited in the kinds of sermons they *could* preach. If we think that their sermons are overly emotional and weak in content, then we must see the flaw as located not necessarily in them but in the whole enterprise of the evangelistic crusade, which by its very nature demanded a simple emotional appeal. And yet, in an increasingly multiethnic America, the evangelistic crusade has done for the Christian faith what no other cultural institution, as far as I can see, could possibly have done. People who become Christians for what some would term "the wrong reasons" can be tutored and developed in the faith; people who do not become Christians at all, obviously, cannot.

But would we want to say that, as the American sermon becomes less expository and more hortatory—addressed more towards the heart and the will than to the understanding—it becomes more literary? It is certainly tempting to say so, since our most common definitions of literature link it to the "heart" rather than to the "head." But if Edwards could produce sermons that were, or that he tried to make, literary but not rhetorical, it might also be possible to preach sermons that are rhetorical but not literary. It's worth noting in this context that the earlier sermons in this collection were in every case crafted as *written* words: only after the composition was complete did the preachers memorize and recite, rather than simply read, their homilies. (In this practice they were following ancient models of rhetoric, which divided the art of speaking into five parts: *inventio*, or the generation of ideas; *dispositio*, or the organization of those ideas; *elocutio*, or the putting of those ideas into a suitable style; *memoria*, or memorization; and *pronuntiatio*, or dramatically appropriate delivery. It is not clear, by the way, that Edwards followed either the fourth or fifth step.) Thus the sermon in this tradition is, in at least one of the strongest senses of the word, a literary enterprise.

By contrast, many of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century sermons reprinted here were never written down, but rather were recorded and transcribed by listeners. Though such sermons may well have been carefully crafted in the preacher's mind, they nevertheless sometimes depended on inspirations of the moment, and certainly relied heavily on the art of *pronuntiatio*. A sermon by one Brother Carper, here called "The Shadow of a Great Rock in a Weary Land," was preached (probably in the 1840s) in the hearing of a Methodist missionary in Missouri named James V. Watson. Watson was much taken with the sermon and with the preacher—the son of a slave woman and her master—who in Watson's opinion preached with "the genius of an Apollos and the force of an Apostle." He recorded that Brother Carper "read with hesitancy and inaccuracy; seeming to depend less upon the text to guide him, than his memory"; but when Brother Carper got going his delivery was clearly so vital to his success that Watson made a point of recording his speech phonetically:

> But, brederen, de joy ob de belieber in Jesus am set forth in a figerative manner in de text [Isaiah 32:2]. It am compared to water to dem what be dying ob thirst. O, how sweet to de taste ob de desert traveler sweltering under a burning sun, as if creation was a great furnace! Water, sweet, sparklin', livin', bubblin', silvery water, how does his languid eye brighten as he suddenly sees it gushing up at his feet like milk from de fountain ob lub, or leaping from de sides ob de mountain rock like a relief angel from heben. He drinks long and gratefully, and feels again de blessed pulsations ob being.

However imperfectly, Watson's transcription captures some of the energy that must have driven Brother Carper: the rhythms depend upon balanced clauses, while a curious and not wholly describable beauty arises from the combination of colloquial grammar ("it am compared") and a highly "literary" vocabulary ("silvery," "languid," "pulsations"). Still, as one reads Watson's account, one is aware of a certain lack of access to an experience that seems to have transfixed an audience.

But another black preacher in this collection benefits exceedingly by the art of transcription, perhaps because he was blessed with a more artful transcriber. Zora Neale Hurston—one of this century's major American writers—records for us a sermon delivered in Eau Gallie, Florida, by one C. C. Lovelace, about whom, apparently, nothing is known. Hurston represents the preacher's brilliant poetic flights by changing the format from prose to verse when he really sets sail:

> And one of de disciples called Jesus
> "Master!! Carest thou not that we perish?"
> And He arose
> And de storm was in its pitch
> And de lightnin played on His raiments as He
> stood on the prow of the boat
> And placed His foot upon the neck of the storm
> And spoke to the howlin' winds
> And de sea fell at his feet like a marble floor
> And de thunders went back in their vault
> Then He set down on de rim of de ship
> And took the hooks of His power
> And lifted de billows in His lap
> And rocked de winds to sleep on His arm
> And said "Peace be still."

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"The preacher is a true poet," Hurston later wrote, and this poem is not one I am likely to forget.

With the exception of Sister Aimee Semple McPherson—whose vivid sermon here gives every appearance of being transcribed from speech, using as it does a dialogue format that would be fully comprehensible only if it were spoken—the white evangelists don't come off as well. Least impressive of all is Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon faith, whose sermon is a confused farrago of incoherent statements, leavened by a kind of swaggering defensiveness: "I have now preached a little Latin, a little Hebrew, Greek, and German; and I have fulfilled all. I am not so big a fool as many have taken me to be. The Germans know that I read the German correctly." (This accompanied by repeated claims to moral perfection: "I never think any evil, nor do anything to the harm of my fellow-man.") But the Christian evangelists fare only somewhat better, and that's largely because they lack Smith's egregious character flaws.

Perhaps it is because preaching of their kind is familiar to me from my childhood; or perhaps it is because the virtues of their particular rhetorical styles do not survive transcription; or perhaps it is because the larger musical and (yes) liturgical context of the crusade is missing; but the sermons of D. L. Moody and R. A. Torrey seem to lack all fire and verve.

> You ask me to explain regeneration. I cannot do it. But one thing I know—that I have been regenerated. All the infidels and skeptics could not make me feel differently. I feel a different man than I did twenty-one years ago last March, when God gave me a new heart. I have not sworn since that night, and I have no desire to swear. I delight to labor for God, and all the influences of the world cannot convince me that I am not a different man.

Three hundred years before Moody uttered these words, William Perkins was counseling preachers to employ the plain style and shun ostentation. But Moody's style seems *so* plain, so utterly unadorned, as to be altogether characterless. The rhythms are simplistic, the vocabulary limited and bland; the whole text shuns vivid image or metaphor. Yet Moody was undoubtedly an immensely effective evangelist. Whatever virtues he possessed simply do not appear in this text, while the verbal power of C. C. Lovelace fairly blows out of the page, like a holy version of the storm Jesus stilled.

And that raises a question about the governing notion of this collection, that the sermon is a kind of literature. It would seem, to judge by this exemplary collection, that American preaching is rarely very literary: seldom does it exhibit the kind of linguistic inventiveness we associate with great writing. At the beginning of its history it is unliterary on (anti-Anglican) principle, though preachers could have exhibited more literary style; later it is unliterary because the preachers have few or no literary resources, and because it becomes more strictly oratorical. Among all the preachers represented here, only Edwards and the black preachers combine theological depth and the mastery of language. And only in Edwards' case is that mastery strictly literary. Therefore the interest of this book, while great indeed, is primarily theological and historical rather than aesthetic.

Some would protest at the distinctions I have made—between rhetorical and non-rhetorical preaching, between literature and rhetoric, between theological-historical interest and aesthetic interest, and so on. I have said that we may thank the movement of literary scholars towards cultural studies for this collection, and that is true, but certainly the current arbiters of cultural studies would strenuously deny the distinction between literary and nonliterary texts. Stephen Greenblatt, the founder of the movement called New Historicism, wrote some years ago that "literary and nonliterary texts circulate inseparably" in a culture, which is undoubtedly true; but that very point, as Greenblatt understood when he made it, relies on our ability to distinguish between those two types of texts. Greenblatt's successors, in their pious and, they believe, radically historicizing urge not to "privilege" the literary, refuse so to discriminate; but they are wrong to refuse.

It would be enough to say that they are wrong because distinction, discrimination, is near the heart of any intellectual enterprise. As the philosopher Bernard Williams has noted in a different context, we are often in our thinking unnecessarily reductive, and end by suffering from a kind of poverty of concepts: we don't account for different phenomena very well because we don't have enough distinct terms with which to talk about them. But in the case at hand historical reasons for preserving the distinction between the literary and nonliterary are still more compelling. The most literate of American preachers formed their homiletical practice in contrast to a group of preachers they found overly "literary" (though that is not the word they would have used). For them, the realm of beautiful language was a seductive and spiritually dangerous one: thus Perkins' insistence on a plain style of exposition. Stylistic embellishment is a form of vanity, both in the common sense and the sense employed by Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity, saith the Preacher." The "divorce between literature and theology" that I lamented in my opening paragraphs never happened in America, because the two were never married in the first place—indeed, they were barely acquainted, and their relationship was characterized by mistrust, especially on the theological side.

Michael Warner's mistrust of the philosophical va-

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lidity of this distinction between the literary and the nonliterary has, then, a curious result. In the book he has edited, we find the history of the American sermon wonderfully encapsulated—and much of the salient history of American religion encapsulated along with it. But the impetus for this collection was a literary enterprise, a context into which these sermons manifestly do not fit. A truly literary anthology of American sermons would look very different from this one; but I doubt it would be nearly as good. FT

Baptism

Since the cold sea first learned to speak in tongues
and howled aghast at its madman's chains,
since the Eden break, since the winterspring,
since the star-aspired spires rained
back to earth with stone disdain,
who's thanked the Lord for broken things?

Down the babbled days that brook no praise
or blame—no everlast, no stay—
the brutal waters waste to bless:
the transubstantial stones decay,
the solid monstrance wears away.
Nothing is its inwardness.

The greenhill blood the green heart beats,
even this at last must cease.
From the sudden shade, from the owl light,
a sparrow falls and falling, dies.
The blood tide dims. Dark waters rise
till lowered sky and lakeshore meet

and all things fade: this pine, this tree,
this life, this world, this *this*, now not—
and yet, not not. In dark we see:
nothing's found where nothing's sought,
in silence is the silence caught,
and still breath moves the unmoving seas.

J. Bottum

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Books In Review

Prophet of Pointlessness

UNWEAVING THE RAINBOW: SCIENCE, DELUSION, AND THE APPETITE FOR WONDER. By RICHARD DAWKINS. *Houghton Mifflin. 337 pp. $26.*

Reviewed by **Stephen M. Barr**

IN READING Richard Dawkins I am reminded of an anecdote told by Werner Heisenberg. Heisenberg and several other great physicists were sitting around one evening talking about God and religion. The discussion ended up being dominated by Paul Dirac, who went into a long diatribe declaring religion to be the opiate of the masses. At the end of the evening someone turned to the brilliant Wolfgang Pauli and said, "You have been very quiet tonight, Pauli. What do you think of what Dirac has been telling us?" Pauli responded, "If I understand Dirac correctly, his meaning is this: there is no God, and Dirac is his Prophet."

Richard Dawkins was not always a prophet. In his early days he wrote well-regarded papers on the rules for grooming in flies and the nesting strategies of digger wasps. It was while toiling in the vineyards of zoological science that he apparently heard the call to preach. His pulpit is an endowed chair in "the Public Understanding of Science" at Oxford, and the message he proclaims in his elegantly written, if somewhat waspish, books and articles is that the universe and life have no meaning. "The universe we observe," he says, "has precisely the properties we should expect if there is at bottom no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pointless indifference."

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The root of Dawkins' philosophy is the insight, derived from neo-Darwinian theory, that life has no ulterior purpose, biologically speaking. Mosquitoes exist to replicate mosquito DNA and dung beetles to replicate dung beetle DNA. The whole drama of life is a meaningless genetic competition. Not surprisingly, many people find Dawkins' vision of a pointless universe rather repellant. He has been accused of spreading a cold and joyless message, a pessimistic nihilism. The present book seems to have been written to respond to these charges. Its preface begins thus:

> A foreign publisher of my first book confessed that he could not sleep for three nights after reading it, so troubled was he by what he saw as its cold, bleak message. Others have asked me how I can bear to get up in the mornings. A teacher from a distant country wrote to me reproachfully that a pupil had come to him in tears after reading the same book, because it had persuaded her that life was empty and purposeless.

THIS PREFACE filled me with the keenest anticipation. I had always wondered what consolations could be found in a philosophy like Dawkins'. What would he have to say to that sleepless publisher or that desperate girl? Not what you might have expected. Here is a passage from chapter one, in which he is describing the time-line of life on earth:

> Fling your arms wide in an expansive gesture to span all of evolution from its origin at your left fingertip to today at your right fingertip. All across your midline to well past your right shoulder, life consists of nothing but bacteria.
>
> Many-celled, invertebrate life flowers somewhere around your right elbow. The dinosaurs originate in the middle of your right palm, and go extinct around your last finger joint. The whole history of Homo sapiens and our predecessor Homo erectus is contained in the thickness of one nail clipping. As for recorded history; as for the Sumerians, the Babylonians, the Jewish patriarchs, the dynasties of Pharaohs, the legions of Rome, the Christian Fathers, the Laws of the Medes and Persians which never change; as for Troy and the Greeks, Helen and Achilles and Agamemnon dead; as for Napoleon and Hitler, the Beatles and Bill Clinton, they and everyone that knew them are blown away in the dust of one light stroke of a nail file.

Vivid, striking, accurate, but hardly consoling.

INDEED, WHAT DAWKINS has to say to troubled souls is, basically, to grow up and stop snivelling: "The adult world may seem a cold and empty place," he writes, "with no fairies and no Father Christmas, no Toyland or Narnia, no Happy Hunting Ground where mourned pets go, and no angels—guardian or garden variety. . . . Yes, Teddy and Dolly turn out not to be really alive."

Dawkins believes that the charge of nihilism and coldness leveled against his philosophy stems from a certain view of science which sees it ridding the world of poetry and romance by explaining things previously steeped in wonder. The title of his book is taken from Keats' poem "Lamia": "Do not all charms fly / At the mere touch of cold philosophy? / . . . / Philosophy will clip an angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries by rule and line, / Empty the haunted air, and gnomed mine — / Unweave a rainbow . . ." The word "philosophy" here refers to "natural philosophy," i.e., science, and the "unweaving" to Isaac Newton's explanation of the rainbow as being due to the prismatic effect of raindrops.

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The greater part of Dawkins' book is devoted to answering Keats. Dawkins points out—and here he is quite right—that an increased understanding of nature should heighten rather than diminish our sense of wonder at it. He uses Keats' own example of the rainbow to make his point. The rainbow is a spectrum of light, and Dawkins explains how understanding this spectrum has enabled scientists to make remarkable discoveries. For example, decoding the spectra of light from stars allows astrophysicists to infer what stars are made of, a feat which one might have thought utterly impossible. And decoding the spectra from distant galaxies is what revealed to Edwin Hubble in 1929 the astonishing fact that the universe is expanding.

DAWKINS DEVELOPS this theme through many variations. Not only light but sound has a spectrum. He describes how the human brain is able to "unweave" the exceedingly complex patterns of sound vibrations that impinge upon our ears and interpret or "reweave" them. He goes on to describe the amazing ability of bats to see with sound, and the way that crickets' song is "cunningly pitched and timed to be hard for vertebrate ears to locate, but easy for female crickets, with their weathervane ears, to home in upon." Dawkins is at his best when describing the wonders which science has learned about living things. In his view, far from ridding the world of poetry, science reveals to us fit subjects for the great poetry of the future.

Dawkins contrasts this with a sense of wonder that feeds on the irrational and the inexplicable. He describes an audience at a magic show that grew angry when the magician's tricks were explained to them. It is this kind of degraded hankering after mystification that lies behind superstitions of all kinds, he alleges, including, of course, religion. What science has done is take the natural appetite for wonder and satisfy it with something true and worthy. Much of the book is taken up with the debunking of superstition in the manner of *The Skeptical Inquirer*.

In contrasting the two senses of wonder, the scientific and the obscurantist (which includes for him the religious), Dawkins directs his scorn at those "who are content to bask in the wonder and revel in a mystery we were not 'meant' to understand." This is a strange reproach, since it is the heart of Dawkins' own creed that we were not "meant" to do anything, let alone to understand. This is but one instance of a curious disjunction that exists between the tenets of Dawkins' philosophy and the values he wishes to base on them.

One sees this also in his discussion of astrology, which he attacks not only as false, but as fraught with "sad human consequences." But one of the problems with materialism is that it is little different from astrology in its human consequences. What is the difference between believing that one's actions are dictated by the orbits of the planets and believing that they are dictated by the orbits of the electrons in one's brain?

THIS BOOK is based in its entirety on a simple mistake. It is not often that one can find exactly the point where an author goes off the track, but here one can. It is in the fifth sentence of the preface of the book, which begins, "Similar accusations of barren desolation, of promoting an arid and joyless message, are frequently flung at science in general." However, what people object to in Dawkins is not the science but the atheism. Because he cannot see the difference, he writes a book that is a 300-page non sequitur. In answering the charge that his atheism is a joyless creed, he says, in essence, that his atheism allows him to derive pleasure from the beauty and magnificence of Nature as revealed by science. He may as well have said that his atheism allows him to enjoy a good steak or a game of baseball, or that his atheism gives him the great advantage of having a nose, two eyes, and ten fingers.

Those who believe in God, including the very substantial proportion of scientists who do, are every bit as able to thrill to scientific discovery as Dawkins is. They embrace scientific understanding and rejoice in it, as he does. But they have as well the joy of their faith, which tells them that the beauty of Nature points to something higher, to a Wisdom greater than their own. For Dawkins it points to nothing. He is welcome to that conclusion, but there is not the slightest reason why any scientist or scientifically minded person should share it.

The Limits of Theory

THE PROBLEMATICS OF MORAL AND LEGAL THEORY. By RICHARD A. POSNER. *Belknap/Harvard University Press. 320 pp. $29.95.*

***Reviewed by* David M. Smolin**

RICHARD POSNER, well-known as both a federal judge and legal academic, is generally recognized as one of the chief originators of the law and economics movement. His latest, awkwardly titled book is a broad polemic against the large role of moral theory in the legal academy, and in favor of his own brand of pragmatism patterned after that of Oliver Wendell Holmes. There is much that is unattractive in this volume. The dreary cover, consisting of large white and gray letters against a black background, well conveys the starkly amoral and rationalistic world of Judge Posner. Nonetheless, despite the unattractiveness of Posner's amoralism, there is much here that the diligent reader may find useful.

Posner is distressed that so much of contemporary legal scholarship elaborates or relies upon diverse moral theories that attempt, in

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highly abstract terms, to make normative claims about law. His thesis is that such moral and legal theories are useless because they lack the capacity to settle contested moral or legal claims. Thus, debates between, for example, Roman Catholic natural law theorists and secular feminist legal theorists over abortion are, for Posner, a waste of time, for neither theoretical approach possesses the tools to persuade anyone of contrary views.

POSNER DESCRIBES the purposes of the intricate theorizing in the legal academy in sociological terms. First, although moral theories cannot persuade those with contrary views, they do promote solidarity among the believers, especially outside the legal academy. Academic moral theory, like preaching, "stiffens the backbone" of one's coreligionists (or co-ideologues) by "convincing people who think like you that they are not alone in their beliefs [and] have the backing of someone who is confident, competent, articulate, and thoughtful."

Second, the esoteric, self-referencing nature of much of contemporary legal theory is a product of the "professionalization" of the legal academy, where law professors have become a profession separate from that of the bench or bar. Posner perceives here a negative form of professionalization, which creates a "professional mystique" through adoption of an "obscurantist style of discourse" that is "impenetrable to outsiders." Posner observes that professions rely on mystique most heavily when they lack knowledge valuable to the rest of society.

Although these two sociological purposes may appear somewhat incompatible, the overall picture is clear. Law professors write solely for other academics, but since their underlying religious/ideological/political positions are relatively conventional, they can also reassure their co-ideologues outside of the academy that someone *really smart* who speaks the language of modern moral/legal theory is on their side. People outside the academy still give enough credence to academics and academic discourse that they want someone in that world to hold and defend their views, even if they themselves would never be able to decipher the academic writings in which they do so.

HAVING INHABITED the legal academy for a dozen years, I can affirm that much of Posner's analysis rings true. It is the case, as Posner asserts, that the legal academy is filled with theorists whose writings will never persuade anyone other than their fellow travelers, and whose risk-averse life situation is well summarized by that famous epithet, "tenured radical."

At the same time, Posner, in describing moral academics as split between "two main subsets, the liberal-secular and the conservative-religious," may mislead readers into believing that the academy is more or less equally split between those two groups. Religious conservatives, however much (dis)credit Posner may give them, comprise but a small and endangered minority in the legal academy. Even at ostensibly church-affiliated law schools, religious conservatives usually make up a minority of the faculty. At most law schools, only a few professors could accurately be described as both religiously active and politically conservative, and some of them are trying to hide it, at least until they can obtain tenure.

Posner offers religious conservatives a backhanded compliment, although most readers are likely to miss it. While ridiculing the claims of both "liberal-secular" and "conservative-religious" theorists, it is only religious theorists whom Posner appears to concede may be able to produce a credible theory of moral realism, based on "faith in a Supreme Lawgiver." He thinks, however, that little needs to be said about such a perspective, since "explicit religious arguments are not a part of academic moralism"—even among religious people. Posner suggests that this lack is unfortunate: those (like John Finnis) who "derive their moral codes from religious orthodoxy make a tactical mistake" when they make secular reason the only legitimate basis for moral claims. Instead, they should point out that both religious and moral secularists ultimately found their views on "faith."

Readers will recognize that Posner is not an authority on the complex and diverse relationships between faith and reason within various religious traditions. In addition, Posner's advice to religious theorists is probably not offered seriously, for Posner would likely follow the reflexive tendency of his colleagues to rule explicitly religious arguments out of bounds if he encountered them in either of his two roles as judge or professor. Nonetheless, within the diverse meanderings of this self-proclaimed skeptic there appears an intuition that moral claims without a foundation in God cannot make that difficult philosophical movement from "is" to "ought."

NATURAL LAW theorists derive from human nature and human goods conclusions about what we ought to do. But it is one thing to state that all human beings have some access to God's law within and through human nature, quite another to expect natural law theories based on reason alone to persuade others about contested moral issues in a context where such theories are stripped of their foundations in God as creator, lawgiver, and judge. Religious believers are attempting to make natural law accomplish something it was never intended to do—justify God's laws without reference to God. Even if one believes (as I do) in the existence of natural law, one can agree with Posner that the current form of natural law discourse has almost no value in persuading secular academics and activists on issues such as abortion, homosexuality, and assisted suicide.

The difficulty with the present use of natural law theory is that it attempts to create a neutral space

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between theistic believer and autonomy-based skeptic. While there is certainly much shared by virtue of common humanity, a correctly directed reason is, at best, only intermittently and imperfectly a part of the human condition. (Indeed, how often we religious believers, even with the additional help of divine revelation, manage to delude ourselves on moral and ethical matters!)

Religious believers are likely to get further in discourse with the current generation of secular academics by 1) continually demonstrating, as Posner himself seems to intuit, that only a moral theory founded on God can actually "work," in the sense of bridging the gap between "is" and "ought"; and 2) demonstrating the inherent self-contradictions of the moral theories advocated by the "secular liberals." The best way to succeed, I would contend, is to move back and forth between the worlds of theistic natural law theory and secular moral theory, rather than trying to occupy a supposedly neutral ground between the two.

AS A PRACTICAL MATTER, most moral academic theorizing in the legal academy is done (in Posner's terminology) on the secular liberal side, and produces policy recommendations (as Posner likes to point out) that are often wildly impractical and unrelated to the actual moral intuitions of much of the population. Contact with reality—which is to say, the actual operation of the legal system and its impact on society—is more likely to confront academics with the immutable truths of human nature than endless theorizing restrained only by the politically correct predilections of one's colleagues. If that is true, then Posner's suggestion that the legal academy might achieve a different and better sort of professionalization through study of the law's actual effects would, on the whole, probably be a positive development.

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Lewis Remembered

C. S. LEWIS: MEMORIES AND REFLECTIONS. By JOHN LAWLOR. *Spence. 132 pp. $22.95.*

Reviewed by **Gilbert Meilaender**

WHEN JOHN LAWLOR became a student at Magdalen College of Oxford University in October of 1936, he found that C. S. Lewis was to be his tutor. At that time, of course, he knew nothing in particular of Lewis, but over the next three years as student—and more years after that as friend and colleague—he

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was to learn much more. There will be increasingly few who can recount their own memories of Lewis the man, the teacher, and the scholar, so it is good that Lawlor has given us his own recollections. He has, however, given much more. This book not only offers memories of Lewis; it also reflects upon and evaluates much of Lewis' literary output.

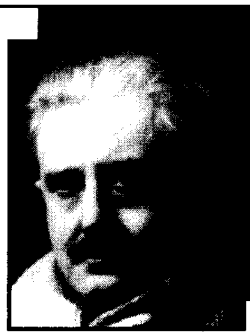
Lawlor's memories of Lewis do not, for the most part, diverge greatly from what others have said, but he has a sense for detail that is effective. From his study of Anglo-Saxon with Lewis he recalls Lewis' suggested translation of *Eala pu biscop* as "Tut! tut! Your Grace." Lewis as tutor was not just witty, however; he was also formidable and in love with argument. "[T]he more the pupil showed a capacity for self-defense the better." To read one's essay for Lewis and submit to his examination of it could be a chastening experience. Some students flourished under the heavy bombardment; others wilted. All were treated with equal—and impersonal—rigor. A phrase such as "no nonsense" might summarize much that Lawlor remembers of Lewis, who did not really enjoy teaching.

From his very first meeting with Lewis, Lawlor had the sense that Lewis did not want to waste time. He "valued time as few men I have met. . . . 'The hungry generations tread thee down' was a witticism he ruefully acknowledged." For all the argumentativeness and rhetorical firepower of Lewis' teaching, however, Lawlor recalls a significant fact: "One thing Lewis never did, in any recollection I have of him. He never imposed his Christianity on the argument." Over time, Lawlor was one of those who flourished under this treatment. He gradually "passed from dislike and hostility to stubborn affection, and then to gratitude for the weekly bout in which no quarter was asked or given."

THERE IS MORE to Lawlor's memories than just a student's view of Lewis. He also provides sketches—some brief, at least one longer—of others at Oxford who moved in Lewis' circle of friends: his brother, W. H. Lewis, Hugo Dyson, Adam Fox, Nevill Coghill, and, at greater length, J. R. R. Tolkien. Lawlor explores the deep friendship between Lewis and Tolkien, but also the strains on that friendship later in life. The two men were, at least on Lawlor's recollection, strikingly alike in some respects—in their "unworldliness," in their indifference to their surroundings, in their deep and abiding faith.

But they were also very different men—Tolkien married with a family, Lewis, for most of his years, unmarried; Tolkien ruminative, Lewis argumentative; Tolkien Catholic, Lewis an Ulster Protestant. Lawlor calls attention especially, though, to their quite differ-

The HEROIC FACE of INNOCENCE



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ent approaches to writing, which perhaps express very different temperaments. Tolkien thought of himself as, in some sense, recording ancient truth, not inventing. Lewis' writing was imaginative, and for him imagination was the organ of meaning, not of truth. For Tolkien, therefore, writing was a task at which one labored, and he was slow to publish. By contrast, Lewis' writing always seems to be a thing of ease, and that very facility was "peculiarly unsettling for Tolkien"—or so Lawlor thinks.

Whatever the truth of the contrast, Lawlor's account of Lewis' own recollection of how he wrote is striking. "He once told me that he was what might be called a 'first-time' writer, in the sense that we speak of 'first-time' gifts in a games-player—no hesitation, the stroke delivered with perfect immediacy. I write one draft, he used to say; then I read it through and correct it; and then if I don't like it, away it goes into the wastepaper basket."

LEWIS WAS NOT only a great writer; he was also a great scholar. Having recalled Lewis the man and the teacher, Lawlor turns to the writings. In separate chapters he explores Lewis' space fantasies, his Narnia stories, the reconciliation of reason and imagination—of duty and delight—in his writing, and his critical works as a scholar of English language and literature. On these matters Lawlor's judgments are always informative and sometimes diverge in interesting ways from commonly held assessments of Lewis' work.

Thus, for example, Lawlor knows that critics have tended to regard *That Hideous Strength* as the weakest of the three space fantasies —containing more themes than Lewis can successfully draw together in a coherent narrative. But he disagrees. "I, on the contrary, find in this last work of the trilogy a freedom and energy that superbly command attention, and an ironic humor that stamps the authenticity of characters and setting." The denouement of that story, the confounding of tongues at the banquet at Belbury, has often been criticized —even by friends of Lewis such as Owen Barfield and Austin Farrer— as a piece of buffoonery. For Lawlor, though, and perhaps for some other readers whose estimate he will reinforce, it is "Lewis at his best."

Among Lewis' best works, of course, the *Chronicles of Narnia* is generally near the top of the list. Lawlor notes how, imaginatively, the *Chronicles* move to a different perspective from that of the space fantasies. The fantasies are stories of interplanetary voyaging. They take us into strange (to us) worlds, but not, strictly speaking, into other worlds. They take us to other planets that are still a part of our

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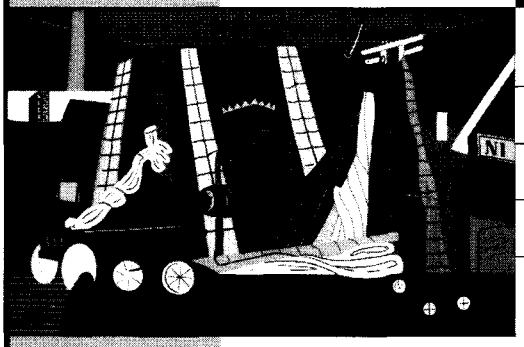
world, to which we could get if we just went far enough. But the Narnia stories take us into "a really Other World" that could be reached only by magic, as Uncle Andrew puts it in *The Magician's Nephew*. Notes Lawlor: "There is the farewell to space-fantasy, couched in terms that draw upon the older meaning of the word 'world.'" In the Narnia stories, therefore, we travel in time, but into a time-dimension not correlated (in any way we can understand) with earthly time. This gives, Lawlor thinks, "the true liberation of the human spirit," which is "a release from the order of merely successive time to a simultaneity which knows nothing of past or future. . . . This has, not surprisingly, an entirely liberating effect on the writer's imagination."

Lawlor is an instructive reader of the *Chronicles*. He notes, for example, how MacPhee of *That Hideous Strength* is re-presented in new form in the person of Trumpkin in *Prince Caspian*. Each is something of a skeptic and a rationalist, slow to believe. Each, therefore, teaches us the importance of "a capacity for mere obedience." Thus, Lawlor suggests, that "'bare willing of obedience' is an abiding principle throughout the *Chronicles of Narnia*; and since it is so, allowing no variation or exception, there is ample room for banter, for cheerful parody." I have to admit that I cannot concur in Lawlor's judgment that *The Silver Chair* is "the perfect Narnian story," though he is right to note that the Great Snow Dance, at the end of that story, is "the paradigm of freedom in submission to constraint."

FOR LEWIS' SCHOLARLY WRITINGS Lawlor is a knowledgable guide. If Lewis is both writer and scholar, Lawlor thinks he is first of all writer, a fact that is strikingly apparent in his literary criticism. It may be useful here simply to note some of the judgments Lawlor offers. *The Allegory of Love*, which first established Lewis' critical reputation, "joins company with the very small class of books for which a future can be confidently predicted." Even if some of Lewis' positions have been overturned or modified, *Allegory* "remains compulsively readable, as few other works of historical literary criticism can claim to be, even in isolated passages." *A Preface to Paradise Lost* contains "the most remarkable single piece of criticism in Lewis' entire output—the brilliant account of Virgil as one who 'added a new dimension to poetry.'"

Lewis' volume on sixteenth-century literature in the *Oxford History of English Literature* is hampered, in some respects, by the artificial confines of a century. "Lewis has no bent for detecting order or pattern within set chrono-

The Virgin AND THE



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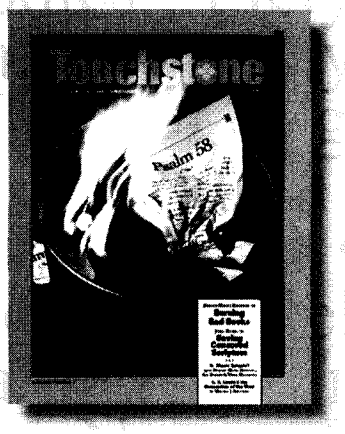
logical limits," though he is often here "at his best in the accounts he gives of favorite authors." Lawlor reminds us that in this volume Lewis, when translating neo-Latin authors of the century, consistently translated them into sixteenth-century English. His motive was not mere "idle virtuosity," but, as he himself put it, to keep readers from supposing that Latinists translated into contemporary English were somehow less remote or more enlightened than vernacular writers of the same period. The doing of it is, however, a remarkable achievement. "If few had been sensitive enough to perceive this defect, inherent in the historical study of literature, there were even fewer who had the wit and scholarship to remedy it."

Studies in Words "captivates and exhilarates even at the seventieth times seven of re-reading." *An Experiment in Criticism*, however one reacts to the theory it defends, shows that "No one ever spoke from so full and unjaded an experience as reader." *The Discarded Image*, Lewis' introduction to the medieval picture of the world, is "an instance of scholarship which, truly, 'leads *in*'" to the literature rather than taking one out of it as so much criticism does.

WHEN LAWLOR COMES, in the Postscript, to ask himself what it was that was distinctive about Lewis, he offers an illuminating answer: "I have to say that it was his being able to accept, with unusual simplicity and absolute constancy, the concept of Divine forgiveness of sin.... Newness of life sustained a special receptivity to each day's offering to the senses and imagination." This was not, Lawlor thinks, a matter of the will, and he thereby differs from Owen Barfield, who thought that Lewis as Christian had adopted a kind of willed indifference to himself, a studied impersonality. Lawlor, however, thinks of it not as a matter of the will but as a special gift. If one believed in forgiveness, one could only accept it thankfully. "He once clarified this by reminding an anxious correspondent that when the Sun stands overhead at noon, it casts no shadow of the man beneath."

Released from himself by this forgiveness, Lewis' enormous creative energies were liberated. Reason and imagination could be reconciled in a "unified sensibility," in a life directed out of the self toward God. Thus, Lawlor concludes, "if we put his work to the test of a fully attentive reading we may record of Lewis, as he did of Spenser, that 'to read him is to grow in mental health.'"



Criticism

"If you want two hours of excitement with a bit of steamy sex thrown in with a certain shallow level of interpersonal moralizing, go see *The English Patient.* If you want to lengthen the experience to three hours, go see *Titanic.*"

Patrick Henry Reardon
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Ecorealism

THE VIRGIN AND THE DYNAMO: THE USE AND ABUSE OF RELIGION IN ENVIRONMENTAL DEBATES. By ROBERT ROYAL. *Ethics and Public Policy Center/Eerdmans. 262 pp. $25.*

Reviewed by **Thomas Sieger Derr**

MOST RELIGIOUS WRITING about the environment, whether from traditional and mainstream religions or from some new consciousness, tends to treat nature as a steady-state paradise, a self-regulating harmony where balances temporarily upset are smoothly restored. From this assumption it follows that humans are unwelcome intruders or at best a life form that has exceeded its natural limits.

THOMAS SIEGER DERR *is Professor of Religion and Ethics at Smith College.*

Having trashed Eden, then, we are obligated to find a way to restore it.

Robert Royal understands these views as sentimental foolishness. In *The Virgin and the Dynamo,* he presents the natural world in all its dramatic variability over time, where the alleged "balances" are only relative, and, even so, never endure. Terrible things have happened to and on the earth, unpredictable things quite outside of slow natural evolution, from collisions with asteroids to volcanic eruptions to ice ages, which have destroyed many species and made life for the rest precarious. Realism about earth's history should thoroughly disabuse us of those ill-conceived environmentalist fantasies about the planet's natural hospitableness to human life, provided we leave it mostly alone. That is simply not the law of life, and science will not support it.

Royal is careful to honor the work of scientists throughout this lucid and sane book, respectfully integrating his theological judgments with their work. In an ambitious, very useful, and blessedly clear chapter, he moves beyond the realm of environmental science to sketch the current state of the conversation between science and religion, paying special attention to physics and cosmology. This is a reach not usual in books on environmental ethics, but is used appropriately and suggestively to round out a theological discussion of the doctrine of creation. It is done with admirable modesty and a healthy regard for the uncertainty of many scientific judgments.

FROM HIS SURVEY of the applicable science Royal draws the inescapable conclusion that the universe and life within it develops and changes, so that no one place or moment can be considered scientif-

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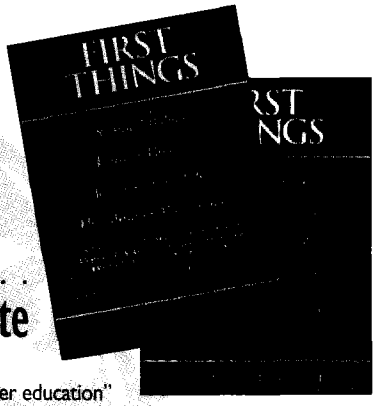

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ically or theologically normative. There is little sympathy here for either a fundamentalist reading of creation or the secular nature-romanticism characteristic of so much of the environmental movement, really a kind of pantheism where nature "herself" is God(dess). I was reminded of the difficulties raised by the motto "the integrity of Creation," used by the World Council of Churches and others to signify the ecological standard. The phrase comes close to being scientifically meaningless, suggesting as it does a picture of unity and harmony, wholeness and completeness in nature that does not exist. Royal's realism is better, truer, wiser.

We in the biblical tradition who hold a theological doctrine of creation do, however, need to confront the problem of what appears from our human perspective to be evil in nature—floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, diseases. The problem is almost manageable within a worldview where nature is harmonious, balanced, fecund, and good, save for the depredations wrought by human sin. But when scientific realism shows us a natural world that is anything but harmonious and balanced, a world full of nonmoral events and of entities that intend us harm, the problem of natural evil becomes much less theologically tolerable. Leibniz gave it the name "theodicy," and the term has endured. He thought this really was "the best of all possible worlds," and solved his problem by thinking of natural evil as merely the dark shadings in a picture, there to bring out the good.

But Royal would hardly subscribe to such optimism. Candidly, bluntly, he writes,

> Nature itself and the God who created it show little in common with today's usual environmental view of the world as a constant, benign, and nurturing place except when foolish or outright evil human acts disrupt it.... The notion of nature as our Mother, as a being greater and better than ourselves, is—and always was—mistaken.... Our concern for nature has to acknowledge the imperfection of the world even as it recalls the biblical assurance that creation is good.

ROYAL ALSO PROVIDES a sharp and wholly decent rejoinder to the "real and open callousness about human beings" among some environmentalists that surfaces in the wake of their critiques of human behavior toward nature. The movement criticizes human activity as "the cancer upon nature," forgetting that human energy in agriculture, commerce, and industry has made life more tolerable for ordinary people. But of course the environmental movement is driven not by ordinary people who have to wrest their living from the earth, Adam's descendants all, but by those who have the leisure and the economic privilege to enjoy their "natural" surroundings. The movement's traditional answer is thus to limit population so there will be fewer of the common people to pollute the earth and consume its finite resources. Some contemporary environmentalists, to their credit, see the immorality of this elitist position, and, angered or shamed by it, have responded (not very helpfully) by promoting "ecojustice," the simplistic notion (which Royal quite properly rejects) that sound ecology and human justice are mutually reinforcing practices.

Royal's view of ecology, then, is human-centered—"human survival ecology," as it has been called. We must find a way to make room for humanity while safeguarding the natural environment that makes our life possible. We have to "decide what is good for human beings and the things they most value and try to fit those as well as possible into a

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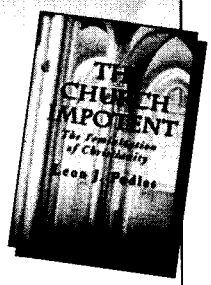

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biosphere that, properly managed, we may hope to preserve and enhance even as we know it will both nurture and threaten us."

Public environmental policy, therefore, ought to be driven by an activist, interventionist mentality. Our intelligent adaptability is what has enabled us to survive the many natural environmental changes the earth has produced, and we will surely need to adapt again in the future. The human race, with its technology and science, is not an alien presence after all, but a part of nature's way of creating new and more complex life forms. We are not the enemy of nature, operating outside and against it when we create our modern civilization, but a part of natural processes that have been going on "forever," the quite expectable extension of what has always been happening.

WILL SUCH VIGOROUS human creativity lead to ecological disaster? Royal thinks not. Rejecting the apocalyptic scenarios of environmental doomsayers, he sounds notes of cautious optimism. We are getting better about controlling environmental damage and don't face extinction any time soon, and maybe not ever. He devotes some time to optimists who think science and technology will indeed solve most of these problems, that on balance they are hopeful forces. His survey of specific "hotspots" shows a pattern of exaggerated fear and overreaction from all too many prominent environmental writers. Royal concludes instead that "there is probably no environmental problem on the radar screen at present that is intractable," although we ought to keep up our guard and push "strenuous efforts to produce more with less and improve environmental effects of human activity for a long time to come." "Entrepreneurs, engineers, and inventors will be the salvation of the earth in far more concrete ways than most environmentalists."

Despite this general criticism of the movement, Royal is not unappreciative of the good it has done in alerting us to real dangers. The result is that, thus warned, we have bent our science, technology, and industry to quite successful correctives. (His attitude is similar to my own reaction to the anti-nuclear movement: it should not succeed, lest we lose a technology that may one day solve our energy problems; but neither should it go away, lest the industry get careless about its real dangers.)

ROYAL IS ACTUALLY more charitable to ecologists, no matter how alarmist they are, than he is to religious writers who want to jettison modern industrial civilization and substitute for it a vague "ecocentric" spirituality. He has no patience for claims that our alleged environmental crisis is driven by our prevailing religious, or quasi-religious, arrogance toward nature. These theories are usually blamed on the biblical tradition, our greed, or other faults that require a whole new outlook, a conversion to some new (or recovered) mysticism. These people, he says, are irrelevant; they have simply put themselves "outside the conversation of mature, democratic people."

Still, they are loud voices that come in many varieties, and so deserve extended commentary. The heart of the book is a discussion of current thinkers on the relation of religion to ecology, including Thomas Berry, Frederick Turner, Arne Naess and the "deep ecologists," Matthew Fox, various ecofeminists, Leonardo Boff, and Al Gore, among others, ending with the present reviewer. He finds fault with most of them (although —let there be full disclosure—not the last one), skewering some for sloppy science, others for wild exaggeration and fanciful invention, still others for callous antihumanism. Although he is careful to give

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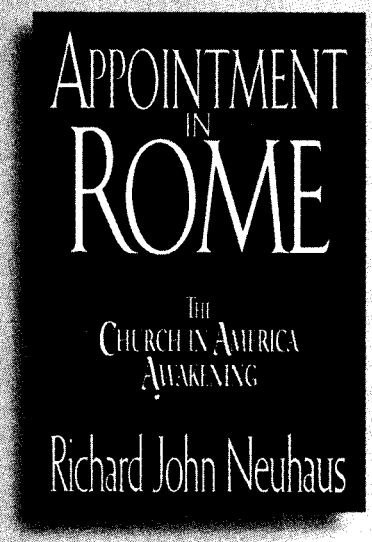

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praise where it is due (particularly to Turner), his assessments are sobering; and anyone who has found these people at all persuasive ought to read his critiques.

Against them Royal offers his measured realism, his theological traditionalism, his restrained optimism, and his hope. We are entitled by our religion to hope, as long as we remember that we do not and cannot control our destiny completely. Human intelligence and creativity are part of nature's story, and properly used may yet find their way to a new glory for all of creation. We have to remember, though, that the story never ends, and only God knows our ultimate destiny. "We do not have all the answers—about anything. We are not the Creator, and the best we can hope for in a world that by its very nature exceeds our mastery is a reasonable hope about the human future."

A Confederate Theodicy

A CONSUMING FIRE: THE FALL OF THE CONFEDERACY IN THE MIND OF THE WHITE CHRISTIAN SOUTH. By EUGENE D. GENOVESE. *University of Georgia Press. 180 pp. $24.95.*

Reviewed by **Russell Hittinger**

A GENERATION AGO, in the old "New South," it was said that the War Between the States was not about slavery so much as about honor and, of course, about a proper understanding of the Constitution. Recalled were the military virtues of Jackson, the moral virtues of Lee, and the intellectual virtues of Calhoun. These, when decoupled from slavery, could be safely celebrated as American values. Whatever truth there was in this position that there were issues at stake other than slavery, it certainly is not the whole truth, or even the most interesting part of the truth of the antebellum South. Because as everyone knows, there existed a slaveholding society from the Potomac to the Rio Grande that sacrificed more than a quarter of a million of its own men on battlefields rather than abandon that institution.

In *The Slaveholders' Dilemma* (1992), and again in this most recent book, *A Consuming Fire,* Eugene Genovese shows that in the contemporary self-understanding of Southerners, their views of states rights, religion, and society were all mixed with slavery. The slave system provided the social context for how they thought about local political authority, economics, and their social and religious duties. Before the war the best of Southern thinkers and clergy of all denominations defended slavery on its moral, religious, and social merits. During the war white Christian Southerners re-

RUSSELL HITTINGER *is the Warren Professor of Catholic Studies and Research Professor of Law at the University of Tulsa.*

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garded slavery, not states rights or military valor, as the fulcrum of divine judgment; and slavery became for them the key to explaining the failure of Southern arms.

IN *A CONSUMING FIRE*, Genovese revisits the issue of Southern guilt about slavery. Relying upon writings, speeches, and sermons of the era, he establishes convincingly that Southerners indeed felt guilty—felt that the institution of slavery was tried by divine providence in the court of history and found wanting. As many Southerners understood it, their failure was not due merely to the inevitable supremacy of Northern industrial power, to being on the wrong side of history, as it were; more pointedly, it was understood as a moral and religious failure of the slaveholders themselves. Prior to the defiance so characteristic of Southern opinion during Reconstruction, there was a significant reckoning with this guilt. But of course we want to know what, precisely, they felt guilty about; like a confessor, we want the details. According to Genovese, they certainly did not understand themselves to be guilty simply for having held slaves.

The slaveholding class preferred not to treat slavery "in the abstract." One reason is that biblical and historical evidence convinced them that slavery was not an evil in itself. The great civilizations of record—Egypt, Israel, Greece, Rome—had slavery. And although the seigneurial order of the feudal period could not be counted a slave system, it was marked by personal servitude. Slaveholders were aware that while philosophic opinion denied that slavery is necessitated by natural justice, neither was it, as a creature of custom and positive law, always condemned.

Knowing that tradition provided little ground for resolving the problem of slavery in the abstract, and knowing that such a debate tended to favor their abolitionist critics, slaveholders tried to avoid it. As Genovese shows, however, it was impossible for American slaveholders to view the problem as an altogether peculiar institution, a mere contingency of place and time. Indeed, during the nineteenth century, particularly in the two decades prior to the war, Southern thinkers—clergy, journalists, educators, lawyers, and statesmen—defended slavery in the abstract anyway.

Their defense was essentially twofold. First, slavery was considered in light of the political and economic revolutions threatening Europe at mid-century. Thomas Roderick Dew, President of William and Mary, for instance, proposed that class warfare would be the almost certain outcome of the upheavals, leading to a chronic exploitation and immiseration of free labor forced to make its way in an open market. Eventually, exigencies of public order would require resort to military despots who would quell the masses by offering minimal cradle-to-grave security while protecting the propertied class. According to this scenario, variations on which were held by many thoughtful Southerners, especially after the European revolutions of 1848, the revolutionary societies would prove unable to protect either liberty or society. In other words, the destiny of free labor was something much worse than what prevailed in the South, where, in the institution of slavery, cradle-to-grave security already existed unburdened by the violent ideologies of modernity.

Second, and more important for the purposes of *A Consuming Fire*, the slaveholders considered slavery within the theological context of the Abrahamic household, where unequals—master and servant, man and woman, parent and child—constituted a common good not reducible to the abstract equality of a contract. Southern theologians, we could say, took the side of Filmer

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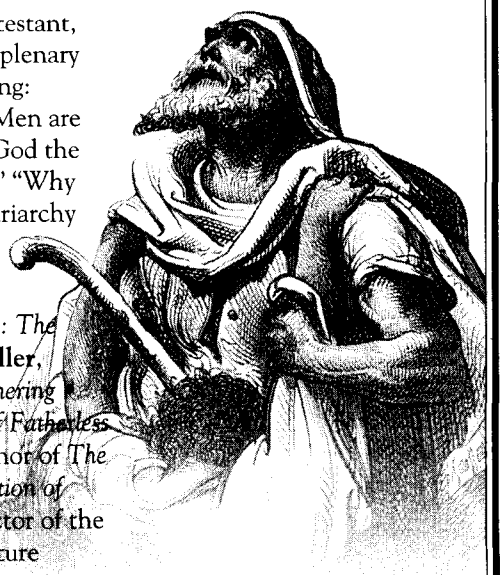

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against Locke by emphasizing the paternalistic and hierarchical family as the anchor of social justice and political order. God made men for society; therefore social predicates took precedence over property rights. On this view, slaves differed little in status from women and children. Labor was not a commodity, but a trust fund overseen by the master. As these thinkers saw it, scriptural standards required the master to be a husband, both in the proper and the extended meaning of the term. Thus could be overcome, they reckoned, the violence of class warfare, the poverty of the masses, and the godless ideologies that drove socially untethered free labor.

EVEN BEFORE THE WAR, it had become apparent that such abstract arguments could not easily be reconciled with the actual practice of slavery. Catholic and Protestant clergy took to their pulpits to denounce the failure of slaveholders to protect slave families. How could the separation of man and woman, mother and child on the auction block comport with the scriptural standard? The authentic husband does not sell his family. Nor does he dissolve the families bound to him by personal servitude. In 1844, Roman Catholic Bishop Benedict Flaget of Missouri threatened excommunication to masters who refused to have slaves receive the sacrament of marriage. While not professing the same sacramental theology as Catholics, Protestant clergy of virtually every denomination fulminated against violations of the laws of God concerning marriage and chastity.

What especially provoked the ire of Protestant clergy was the wave of anti-literacy laws enacted by Southern states. These laws forbade teaching slaves to read and write, or even to have paper or writing implements. It was pointed out that such laws only confirmed the Romish despotism of not entrusting the Bible to the ignorant masses. In 1863 a select committee of the Presbyterian Church issued a report calling for reform of the slave codes, repeal of anti-literacy laws, protection of slave marriages, and prohibition of fornication, bigamy, incest, and rape. The report noted that the slave codes make sense only on the supposition "that the slave is not a man, but a brute, with a brute's propensities, a brute's nature, and a brute's destiny."

In one of the most interesting sections of the book, Genovese points out that Southern churches resisted the theories of polygenesis and "scientific" racism that swept the North in the 1830s. Such theories found a home not only among Northern liberal theologians who rejected orthodoxy and scriptural authority, but also among northern Demo-

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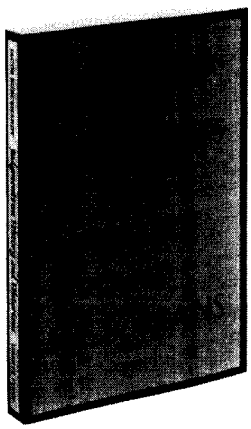

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crats, such as Stephen Douglas, who seized upon these theories as a convenient way to excuse Southern slavery. Southern colleges and seminaries, however, refused to teach polygenesis and scientific racism, since they denied both the account of creation in Genesis and the principles of the Abrahamic household.

"Not until after the fall of the Confederacy," Genovese writes, "did a racial-imperialist ideology emerge in full force, as the South adapted to the values and policies of a triumphant Yankeedom. Indeed, in essential respects, the Southern embrace of imperialism represented a substitute for—and a betrayal of—the ideals and visions of the proslavery worldview, although it was tailor-made for a New South bent on continuing the racial subordination of blacks."

On the Northern view of absolute property in oneself, there was no way to justify suppression of blacks except on the most radical terms: namely, the biological inferiority, or what's worse, the inhumanity, of the race. No doubt, some slaveholders adopted the "scientific" argument, but scriptural doctrine would not permit the consciences of Christian slaveholders to do so. After the war, many Southerners supported segregation on terms that would have seemed profoundly unscriptural to their ancestors. The terms were a Northern import, but they had an especially nasty career in the postbellum South.

GENOVESE DOES NOT claim that the majority of antebellum Southerners held to a pious theory of the Abrahamic household. Slaves were bought and sold for work, not for Christianization or for building an alternative civilization to the godless, industrial North. With respect to Southerners who remained immune to the public theology and the authority of Scripture, Genovese tells us little. In whatever numbers, they must have been a formidable part of the population, and to the extent that they became receptive to the admonitions of the clergy it was rather late in the story. (There was a large revival of religion in the Confederate armies during the War, with perhaps as many as 140,000 conversions in 1863.) Genovese's main point is that a considerable number of Southerners had a theologically informed opinion about the point at issue. They understood that slavery in the abstract and slavery in practice were not reconciled, and that white Christians would face moral judgment for their failure to meet their divinely appointed duties. The war, as the Catholic Bishop of Richmond, John McGill, asserted, was the "scourge of God."

One question Genovese asks is, "Could the slaveholders, as a class, ever have countenanced the kind of reforms that were being urged upon them by their pastors and their own Christian consciences?" His answer is nuanced, but in effect he thinks not. The public theology, such as it was, envisaged reforms that would have proved revolutionary. Marriage, for example, would have implied the right of contract for slaves. The Alabama legislature in 1853 considered a bill to exempt slaves from sale under execution for the master's debt. Surely, civilization would dictate that debts are to be discharged by forfeiting property, not one's family and dependents. But this would have bound slaves to their masters as something more than property. Antislavery pastor Rufus Clark of New Hampshire made the all too obvious point: "Were the Mosaic system to be applied to American slavery, it would be, by the operation of those laws, very soon abolished." Every sincere and clear-sighted proposal for reform pointed in the direction of what the slaveholders were unwilling, or unable, to do: to abandon the practice of property that contradicted their own theology.

A Consuming Fire leaves the reader somewhat unsettled but intrigued about the role of theologically informed arguments in public life, especially in the South. Readers today will probably conclude that the slaveholding class' understanding of scriptural teaching obscured the problem at hand. Genovese remarks in passing that on the problem of labor they had no *Rerum Novarum* to help them imagine how nonslave labor is rooted in something more than a materialistic ideology of absolute property.

In any event, despite the teaching and admonition of the clergy, the

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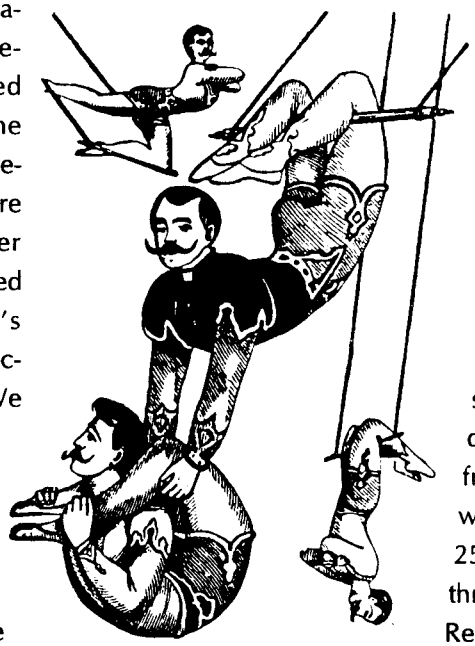
In many Catholic parishes today, the sense of the sacred has largely been banished. The bells, incense, votive candles, and Communion rail are gone. Statues of the saints are locked in the basement, replaced by balloons, banners with greeting-card sentiments, and other dime-store decorations. The Tabernacle with the reserved Sacrament has disappeared from the sanctuary. Formerly at the center of the sanctuary, it's been replaced by the Presider's Chair, where Fr. Gimmick sits. So we no longer genuflect to the Throne of the reserved Sacrament but to Fr. Gimmick's Throne. Indeed, the once-sacred sanctuary has really become a stage. We must clap, clap, clap for the band, the liturgical dancers, the vaudevillians, the pantomimist, and the other clownish entertainers. During the reception of Communion, we have no chance to pray because we're forced to sing another one of those show-tune ditties. And now the kneelers are being ripped out and the crucifix taken down — after all, they're hardly conducive to the three-ring festivities!



In his hip homilies Fr. Gimmick refers to married couples merely as "partners," lest sinners ("domestic partners") feel excluded or uncomfortable. He pooh-poohs Catholic doctrines, and panders with stage props hidden behind the altar and unfunny jokes we feel compelled to laugh at. The *alter Christus* thinks he's the altar comic. The purpose of the liturgy has been transformed from receiving Christ into celebrating our wonderful selves. We've wound up with a Big-Tent Catholicism that's "inclusive" of everyone and anyone, regardless of "lifestyle" or belief, and where Communion primarily occurs at the (SMILE NOW!) Sign of Peace, or so says Fr. Gimmick. But normal people seldom get out of bed on Sunday morning in search of self-affirmation or warm huggies.

Catholics alienated by freakish Masses often jump ship for an Evangelical church — or just stay in bed if they want warmth and self-cuddling. Indeed, church attendance among Catholics has dropped from 70%, just before the clowns were sent in 30 or so years ago, to 25% today. And today, two out of three Catholics don't believe in the Real Presence — why would they, given Fr. Gimmick's stunts and antics over the past three decades?

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society of slaveholders was not reformed. Yet the theology focused guilt, and without it there would not have been the same moral reckoning, a reckoning that depended on interpreting defeat in the light of theodicy. It was a quite different theodicy than the one that prevailed among Northerners, for whom "trampling out the vintage" meant destruction of the institutions of servitude, not judgment on the masters' failure of stewardship over the vineyard.

Talking Straight

HOMOSEXUALITY AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE. Edited by CHRISTOPHER WOLFE. Introduction by William Kristol. *Spence. 320 pp. $29.95.*

***Reviewed by* J. Budziszewski**

AMONG ACTIVISTS who want to keep the "hetero" in "sexuality," a consensus is developing that we need a "public philosophy," a way to speak wisdom to the people. It is pretty much taken for granted that means something different from quoting Scripture to our fellow citizens; they don't all believe in the Bible, those who say they believe it interpret it in diverse ways, and they are suspicious of anything that looks like "forcing one's religious opinions upon others."

The irony is that much of the Bible itself was originally intended as a kind of public philosophy. Thus the book of Proverbs: "Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice; on the top of the walls she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks" (1:20-21). It faced the same problem of rejection in its time that the public philosophy does today: "I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded, and you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof" (1:24-25). Finally, it resembles the new public philosophy in its preoccupation with the dangers of disordered sex: "Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? . . . Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned?" (5:15-16, 6:27)

J. BUDZISZEWSKI *is Associate Professor of Government and Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin and author of* Written on the Heart: The Case for Natural Law.

NONE OF THIS is to suggest that by not mentioning the Bible the advocates of the new public philosophy are doing wrong; not even the Bible demands starting every conversation with the Bible. To pagans, Paul quoted pagan poetry (Acts 17:28), talked about the weather (14:17), and commented on their own secret suspicion that their idols could not save (17:23). In theological terms, what the contributors to this volume are doing is developing a basis in "general" revelation for talking with the American public about homosexuality: a basis in what is known, or can be known, before or apart from the Bible. Part I, "Science," therefore deals with the causes and cures of homosexuality, with the scientific myths about homosexuality, and with the politics of science itself. Part II, "Moral Norms," investigates the standing of homosexuality in the natural law. While in legal terms, Part III, "Law," is rather narrow—it focuses almost entirely on legal recognition of so-called same-sex marriage—in some ways it actually gives a broader overview of the moral problem with homosexuality than does Part II.

This odd division of the moral territory between Parts II and III may reflect an uneasiness about academic natural law theory, something like the uneasiness I mentioned earlier about the Bible. If so, there would be some reason for it. Obviously the theory of natural law should instruct us about things like: 1) what's wrong with homosexuality; 2) why marriage requires two people of opposite sex; and 3) why points 1 and 2 are legitimate concerns of public authority. These things the theory does rather well, and the two essays about it, by Janet Smith and Robert George, are quite good. But there is a deeper problem with the academic theory of natural law, a problem that books which venture into public philosophy tend not to recognize at all. In some

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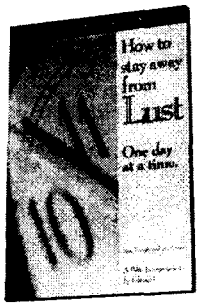

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sense, the theory of natural law supposes that people already know what marriage and sexuality are about—after all, the foundational precepts of the natural law are classically said to be "the same for all, both as to knowledge and as to rectitude." And yet in another sense people are obviously confused about the subject, or we would not be in our present cultural crisis.

For this reason, we need the theory to provide a further instruction which it has not so far offered. To meet the present need, it must help us distinguish between 1) what people not only know about marriage and sexuality, but know that they know; 2) what they know latently, but haven't quite pieced together; 3) what they know, but pretend to themselves that they don't know; 4) what they know latently, but try *not* to piece together; and 5) what they really don't know at all. In the first domain, a public philosophy would only have to offer reminders; in the second, it would have to go further and "connect the dots"; in the third and fourth, it would have to venture the more difficult step of piercing self-deceptions and blowing away smokescreens; and in the fifth, it would have to recapture the enemy-captured arts of expanding the public imagination, speaking to the people of new things, and making familiar to the mind and affections what was previously unimagined.

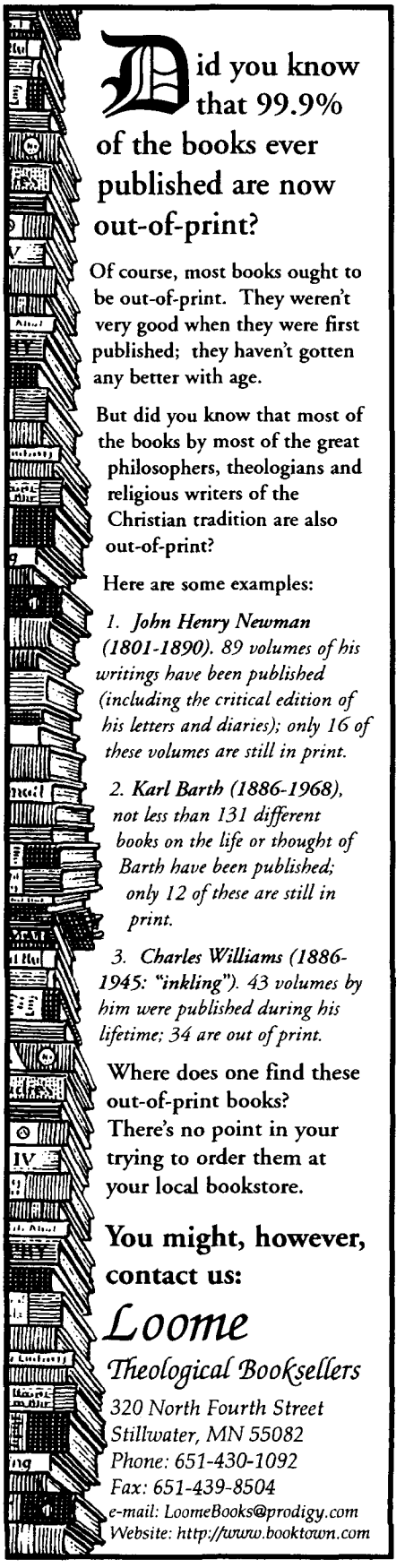
Until our philosophy can do such things, it may be a true philosophy, but it will fall short of true public philosophy because it will still fail to show us how to speak to the people. Only one contribution to the volume (but that is one more than in most such books) touches on these matters directly: Joseph Nicolosi's fascinating essay on "The Gay Deception," which argues that gay identity "is a culturally approved process of *self-reinvention* by a group of people in order to mask their collective emotional hurts." Unfortunately, this contribution is also one of the shortest. I should have liked Nicolosi to comment on how a better understanding of this self-deception might help us develop better ways to tell the truth about homosexuality.

BUT I COMPLAIN too much; pining for one missing virtue should not distract us from other virtues which the present book shows forth in abundance. What are some of the other things we should demand from a collection of essays on homosexuality in American public life?

The popularity of the notion that some people are "born gay" makes it indispensable that such a book include a fair presentation of the research on predisposing factors for homosexual attraction. Articles by Jeffrey Satinover and George Rekers, focusing respectively on biology and on psychological development, serve this purpose fully. Almost as widespread is the related notion, "once gay, always gay." Richard Fitzgibbons and Joseph Nicolosi explode this myth by discussing just what is involved in same-sex attraction disorder, how it should be viewed by therapists, and how it might be treated.

Because the specter of AIDS has been invoked by activists on both the pro and con sides of the movement to make homosexuality "mainstream," another merit of the book is the comprehensive survey of the state of the epidemic by Patrick Derr. Unfortunately, Derr fails to deliver on the second of his stated purposes—to sketch how the politics of AIDS has distorted the scientific and governmental response to it. Particularly helpful would have been a discussion of the allegations of scientific dissidents, for example that the definition of the syndrome is circular, that what is called AIDS in different parts of the world is not the same thing, and that heterodox models of the associated diseases have been suppressed. Perhaps all these allegations are baseless, but if the author thinks that is true, it would have been good to learn why.

During the Clarence Thomas hearings, Senator Joe Biden established his philosophical reputation by remarking that he believed in a different natural law than the one which usually goes by the name—a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natural law, as he gave the public to understand, that allows everyone to do as he pleases. Politicians might find it harder to get away with such flimflam if scholars had not already given it a good reputation. Janet E. Smith weighs in against historian John Boswell's misrepresentation of what Thomas Aquinas taught about homosexuality, restoring Thomist doctrine to its integrity. Robert P. George follows up by attacking the legion of scholars who have propounded the fatuous idea that it is possible for the law to be "neutral" regarding competing understandings of the nature of marriage and the goods that it involves.

IN VIEW OF THE preoccupation of most of the contributors to Part III with the legal crisis in Hawaii, which has since receded, I was prepared to be disappointed by the final section of the book. In fact I was pleasantly surprised; the essays provide not only sharp analysis of legal strategies, which I had expected, but also a good deal of unlooked-for insight into the broader challenge of defending marriage in our civic culture. Hadley Arkes, for example, includes welcome reflections on the dilemmas of talking with friends who tell us they are gay. Michael Pakaluk explains in exactly what sense the common claim that homosexual "marriage" would undermine the heterosexual family is true. Gerard Bradley convincingly shows why the extension of the privileges of marriage to homosexual couples would not be an extension of marriage, but rather the demolition of marriage and its replacement by a novel institution of a different kind. David Orgon Coolidge offers a highly practical analysis of the various understandings of marriage that underlie most public debate, and just how the arguments work.

Well-framed by statements from William Kristol and Richard John Neuhaus, this indispensable volume represents the state of the art of public moral apologetics, and a platform for pushing the art even harder.

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BRIEFLY NOTED

HITLER 1889-1936: HUBRIS. By IAN KERSHAW. *Norton. 845 pp. $35.*

Adolf Hitler is arguably the most important political figure of the twentieth century. His significance rests entirely on what he destroyed or what was destroyed in his name. But who was he? Hitler's background and family were ordinary, his education unremarkable. As a young adult, he lived a largely aimless life, dreaming of artistic accomplishment. Even after he became a public figure most of his days were spent sleeping late in the morning, spending the afternoon in idle conversation, and watching movies at night. By all accounts, Hitler was detached from the details of managing government as head of state. Despite his bluster and his own heroic reconstruction of his life in *Mein Kampf,* Hitler seemed to know, at least at some level, how empty his personal existence was. In March of 1936 he said of himself: "I go with the certainty of a sleepwalker along a path laid out for me by Providence." In their classic biographies, Alan Bullock and Joachim Fest had sought the key to Hitler in his will to power and his mastery of forces. In their view, Hitler was a figure of appalling, satanic greatness. With Kershaw, the reader finds himself contemplating, as Hannah Arendt did a generation ago, "the banality of evil." Hitler was a great speechmaker and an opportunist to be sure. But the key to his success was that things happened to him, people turned to him, those who had power sought to use him. There was about this "nobody from Vienna" a certain blankness upon which people projected what they wanted to be there. The result was the creation of *Der Fuehrer.* Kershaw uses as his organizing motif Max Weber's famous notion of "charismatic leadership." A figure who exercises charismatic authority requires not only native ability, but a receptive social and psychological context on the part of his constituency. Charismatic leadership has often less to do with the will to lead than with the desire to be led. This is the first of a two-volume biography that gives all indications of being, if that is possible with this subject, the definitive account for our time.

— *Walter Sundberg*

THE RELIGIOUS THOUGHT OF HASIDISM. By NORMAN LAMM. *KTAV. 624 pp. $49.50.*

Since Hasidism presents such a spiritually appealing form of Jewish life, and since its practitioners ("Hasidim") are a growing segment of contemporary Jewry, an English source book of excerpts of the major hasidic thinkers, along with informative and scholarly comments, is a desideratum. This is especially so since too much romantic nonsense has been invented

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about this major religious movement in Jewish history. Norman Lamm, the president of Yeshiva University, the most important Orthodox Jewish institution in America, has performed a most valuable service for both Jewish and non-Jewish readers in assembling a vast amount of primary source material and presenting it in a highly readable and attractive format. Unlike apologetic works about Hasidism, the book lets the hasidic thinkers speak for themselves and speak directly to us like few other classical Jewish modes of discourse can do. The translations are accurate and felicitous, while the comments are not overly technical. English readers now have the most comprehensive presentation of the hasidic sources known to this reviewer, which should enable readers to much better evaluate the treatment of Hasidism by modern Jewish thinkers such as Martin Buber and Abraham Joshua Heschel. Norman Lamm, along with his collaborators Allan Brill and Shalom Carmy, has produced a lasting anthology. This book is highly recommended.

— *David Novak*

MORE I COULD NOT ASK: FINDING CHRIST IN THE MARGINS. By JAMES PETERSON. *Crossroad. 191 pp. $12.95.*

Some of the deepest insights into the grace of God and the mission of the Church have come from those who have either experienced suffering, destitution, and imprisonment, or have worked with those who have. In the depths of life, as I discovered in prison (and in the six hundred prisons I've visited since), we experience the most powerful encounters with God. And this is the reality that fills the pages of Father Jim Peterson's poignant memoirs. His is a story of a young man from a solid Catholic background who found his way to a personal knowledge of Christ and an ever-deepening life of faith through his work with needy people in diverse settings: parishes in blue-collar Pennsylvania towns, a Catholic college, prisons, skid row, and the poor of Mexico. This humble priest has led countless broken men, college students, murderers, and couples on the verge of broken marriages to the saving love of God in Jesus Christ. As an evangelical I had understandable difficulties working through some of the practices of Fr. Peterson's Catholic faith, yet at the same time I became almost envious of the depth and purity of his devotion. He writes with such humility and intimacy that as I read I felt myself strangely drawn to him, not just in fraternal bonds, but personally, as if he were an old friend; and more important, I found myself drawn ever closer to

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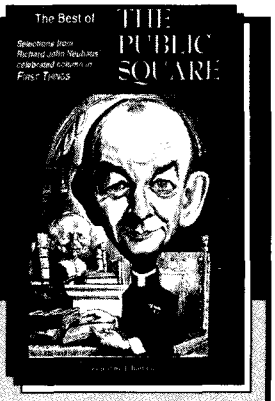

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— *Charles Colson*

MOSES THE EGYPTIAN: THE MEMORY OF EGYPT IN WESTERN MONOTHEISM. By JAN ASSMANN. *Harvard University Press. 276 pp. $27.95 cloth, $18.95 paper.*

Egypt seems always to have been part of the historical memory of the West: in the biblical narrative of Pharaoh and Moses, in the *Histories* of Herodotus, in the liaison between the Egyptian queen Cleopatra and the Roman general Mark Antony, and in the tales of St. Antony, the first Christian to seek God in the solitude of the Egyptian desert. But there is another Egypt, the Egypt before Moses, and in particular the Egypt of Akhenaten, Pharaoh Amenophis IV, who abolished the idols of Egyptian polytheism and established a monotheistic worship of the god of light, Aton. One will find in this fascinating book an investigation of "the history of Europe's remembering Egypt." Assmann's term for this is "mnemohistory," a way of studying the past that is concerned "not with the past as such, but only with the past as it is remembered." Assmann serves as a penetrating critic who shows that before the Enlightenment the books on Egypt spoke the language of the Enlightenment. What the scholars and philosophers presented when they described ancient Egyptian religion looked very much like Spinozism, Deism, pantheism, or "natural religion," the kinds of religious sensibilities they favored. This is a feature of historical scholarship on religion that is no less apparent today than it was two hundred years ago.

— *Robert Louis Wilken*

DUBIOUS MANDATE: A MEMOIR OF THE UN IN BOSNIA. By PHILLIP CORWIN. *Duke University Press. 268 pp. $27.95.*

Corwin was United Nations chief political officer for Bosnia as that terrible conflict was leading up to the Dayton accords. Subsequent events in the Balkans make his candid, even chilling, book timely reading. Sharply critical of the willy-nilly way in which the "mandate" of both NATO and the UN has been transformed, Corwin's account is also a bracing antidote to the media's sensationalist good guy/bad guy scripts for a part of the world that conspires against easy moral judgments.

THE SECULAR MIND. By ROBERT COLES. *Princeton University Press. 189 pp. $19.95.*

A prolific research psychiatrist at Harvard, Coles offers a personal and frequently moving reflection on nothing less than "the fate of the soul." The secular mind is sometimes understood to be at war with the very idea of soul, but perhaps, the author suggests in a hopeful vein, that war will eventually end in a peace treaty recognizing the sacredness of the secular. The mode is more meditational than argumentative, providing many evocative moments even if substantive truth claims remain unclear.

PHILEMON'S PROBLEM: A THEOLOGY OF GRACE. Jubilee Edition. By JAMES TUNSTEAD BURTCHAELL. *Eerdmans. 334 pp. $18.*

The jubilee edition of this remarkable book, now substantially revised, reminds us again of the scope and sensitivity of James Burtchaell's mind. Paul's letter to Philemon provides the inspiration for this "theology of grace": What, Burtchaell asks, must Philemon have thought of Paul's appeal to him to take back his runaway slave Onesimus, not as a slave but as a new brother in Christ? After all, Paul does not call for the abolition of slavery, but for the institution of fellowship *within* that difficult social order. "If [Philemon] considers himself not so much plagued by impossibly competing duties, but haunted by a God whose love comes at him with relentless and incredible energy, then he will burst out of the muddle." And there's the rub, says Burtchaell:

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"There is nothing very astonishing about a God who loves us relentlessly, except that we generally do not believe in one." All too often Christians have been suspicious of the claim that God could love them without their deserving it, and have avoided believing it by positing Jesus as one who saves us from the wrath of the Father, reconciling us to a God who has quite a different view of our sinfulness than his Son does. But Burtchaell demonstrates, on the contrary, that "it is the Father who initiated the entire rescue." Jesus comes precisely to *reveal* the Father's everlasting love; his mission is not to reconcile a wrathful God to sinful humanity, but to return sinful humanity to its loving Father. "The alienation is on our part: it is not God who must be transformed, but ourselves." From this standpoint Burtchaell reconsiders a host of issues from situation ethics to armed force to the sacrament of penance. In each case we are tempted to avoid the "radical regeneration" to which the Father's love calls us, looking instead for easy answers or pious procedures to pull us through (or help us avoid facing) the dilemmas of the Christian life. Jesus, though, challenges us to do more, precisely by providing no simple solutions. As Paul challenges Philemon to find a way to respond to Jesus' revelation of brotherly love, so Jesus asks each of us to let our moral imaginations be animated by the love of the Father. With this book Burtchaell offers scholars and general readers alike a decidedly robust response to the problems of Christian brotherhood.

THE DESECULARIZATION OF THE WORLD: RESURGENT RELIGION AND WORLD POLITICS. Edited by PETER L. BERGER. *Eerdmans. 144 pp. $17 paper.*

Few scholars in this century have contributed so much to our understanding of religion and modernity as Peter Berger. Beginning in the 1960s, he advanced the argument that the collapse of "the sacred canopy" provided by religion creates a crisis for faith, which is forced into a position of "cognitive bargaining" and ends up bargaining away religious substance in order to survive in a relentlessly secular and secularizing modern world. In more recent years, however, Berger has changed his mind and tells why in the lead essay in the present book. The thing that needs explaining, he says, is not the vitality of religion, a phenomenon that puzzles so many secular intellectuals, but why so many secular intellectuals are puzzled by it. The present collection emerges from a conference sponsored by the Ethics and Public Policy Center, and includes essays on the theme by Jonathan Sacks, David Martin, and George Weigel, as well as a reflection on China by

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THE DENSITY OF THE PRESENT: SELECTED WRITINGS. By GUSTAVO GUTIERREZ. *Orbis. 207 pp. $22 paper.*

In the 1960s Gutierrez was acclaimed as the godfather of "liberation theology" with the publication of his book by that title. In fact, there were and are several liberation theologies, and the dominant variety that was tied to Marxist class struggle has been rudely treated by history. Unlike many of those who claimed to be inspired by him, Gutierrez gives clear priority to the narrative of the Church and its gospel. That allegiance is also evident in this collection of occasional writings, especially his reflections on major teaching documents of John Paul II.

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THE OXFORD GUIDE TO UNITED STATES SUPREME COURT DECISIONS. Edited by KERMIT L. HALL. *Oxford University Press. 428 pp. $35.*

An extremely useful compilation and indexing of the major decisions, reflecting the wisdom and follies of the unelected lawyers who assume (arrogate?) the heavy responsibility of governing us.

PRIESTLY CELIBACY TODAY. By THOMAS MCGOVERN. *Scepter. 248 pp. $14.95 paper.*

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THE FIRE OF INVENTION: CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE FUTURE OF THE CORPORATION. By MICHAEL NOVAK. *Rowman & Littlefield. 177 pp. $12.95 paper.*

The most welcome paperback edition of a book that has been widely and justly lauded for its moral evaluation of the contemporary corporation. Max Stackhouse of Princeton Theological Seminary says it "is sure to delight every advocate of the chief organizational instrument of today's global economy, and sure to enrage every lingering socialist." It will also challenge and inform those who are uncritically enthusiastic about the corporation.

TORTURE AND EUCHARIST. By WILLIAM T. CAVANAUGH. *Blackwell. 286 pp. $64.95 cloth, $26.95 paper.*

The author, who teaches at the University of St. Thomas, Minnesota, offers an elegantly written reflection on Church, Eucharist, and politics within the context of the Pinochet regime following the overthrow of Allende in Chile. Those who, while acknowledging the brutalities involved, credit Pinochet with restoring freedom and prosperity will have a hard time overcoming Cavanaugh's opposing politics, but for the theologically minded it is well worth the effort. The antithesis between state and Church, and between Eucharist and the "anti-liturgy" of torture is sometimes metaphorically overdrawn, but *Torture and Eucharist* is an imaginative exercise of sacramental realism tested in a moment of moral and political crisis.

FORGIVING AND NOT FORGIVING. By JEANNE SAFER. *Avon. 210 pp. $23.*

A psychotherapist takes on a perennially important set of questions, engaging also religious teaching with respect to forgiveness. While the book is eminently readable and in many ways suggestive, Dr. Safer's understanding of forgiveness in psychological terms fails to appreciate a biblical view of forgiveness premised upon God's initiative and our response of willing good for those who have offended, quite apart from whether we feel good about them.

AN EXORCIST TELLS HIS STORY. By GABRIELE AMORTH. *Ignatius. 203 pp. $14.95 paper.*

The author is the chief exorcist of

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Rome and the book has reportedly caused quite a sensation in Europe. It is not untouched by an element of sensationalism and some questionable theology regarding the interaction of the natural and supernatural. In what is surely one of the most cautious recommendations of a book, Father Benedict Groeschel, who is also a psychologist, writes in the foreword for the American edition, "This book needs to be read with care but with an open mind."

MARY AND THE FATHERS OF THE CHURCH: THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY IN PATRISTIC THOUGHT. Edited by LUIGI GAMBERO. *Ignatius. 438 pp. $18.95 paper.*

A splendid collection of judiciously chosen texts from the apostolic age to the eighth century on the role of Mary in the economy of salvation. Also among Protestants today, there is something of a revival of interest in the church fathers, and this book powerfully underscores that taking them seriously requires taking seriously what they thought about Mary. These texts illustrate the ways in which orthodox Mariology is derived from and required by orthodox Christology. Highly recommended.

NEITHER POVERTY NOR RICHES: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF MATERIAL POSSESSIONS. By CRAIG L. BLOMBERG. *Eerdmans. 288 pp. $20 paper.*

A professor of New Testament at Denver Seminary begins by reporting that he has suffered some physical disabilities in his life and therefore knows a little about being powerless. "Nevertheless, it is important for me at the outset of this book to admit frankly that I am not poor economically and that I realize this does limit my ability to understand the topic of this book to a certain extent." His problem, apparently, is that he has not sold all he has and given it to the poor. The author's unseemly sense of guilt, combined with his apparent unfamiliarity with both modern economic theory and practice and a large Christian literature pertinent to his topic, limits his ability more than he realizes. It is a shame, for the subject is of permanent importance.

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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Dropping Bombs Into Tangled History

The U.S.-NATO attack on Serbia was a good occasion to go back and read Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia.* A big book of more than a thousand pages, it was first published in 1941 and is available in Penguin paperback. Dame Rebecca attained the age of ninety-one, dying in 1983. (When I mentioned the book to Bill Buckley, he said he knew her. I'm not surprised. He knows everybody.) *Black Lamb* is as remarkable for its grand historical sweep as for its fine writing. It had, at least in part, a political purpose at the time it was published. London was going through the blitz, and Dame Rebecca believed the British could take inspiration from the Serbs and their brave resistance to the Nazis—as they had resisted the Ottoman and other empires through the centuries, usually ending up as the "black lamb" sacrificed to the ambitions of imperial falcons. The book is devastating on the role of the Germans and Austro-Hungarians in the Balkans.

But *Black Lamb* is not chiefly about politics. Here, for instance, is a reflection on the women of Bosnia. They had to wait on their men while they ate, take beatings at regular intervals, work until they dropped, and walk while the master rode. Dame Rebecca writes: "Yet, I wonder. Dear God, is nothing ever what it seems? The women of whom this tale is told, and according to all reliable testimony truly told, do not look in the least oppressed. They are handsome and sinewy like their men; but not such handsome women as the men are handsome men. A sheep-breeder of great experience once told me that in no species and variety that he knew were the male and female of equal value in their maleness and femaleness. Where the males were truly male, the females were not so remarkably female, and where the females were truly females the males were not virile. Constantly his theory is confirmed here. The women look heroes rather than heroines, they are raw-boned and their beauty is blocked out too roughly. But I will eat my hat if these women were not free in the spirit. . . .

"I suspect that women such as these are not truly slaves, but have found a fraudulent method of persuading men to give them support and leave them their spiritual freedom. It is certain that men suffer from a certain timidity, a liability to discouragement which makes them reluctant to go on doing anything once it has been proved that women can do it as well. This was most painfully illustrated during the slump in both Europe and America, where wives found to their amazement that if they found jobs when their husbands lost theirs and took on the burden of keeping the family, they were in no luck at all. For their husbands became either their frenzied enemies or relapsed into an infantile state of dependence and never worked again. If women pretend that they are inferior to men and cannot do their work, and abase themselves by picturesque symbolic rites, such as giving men their food first and waiting on them while they eat, men will go on working and developing their powers to the utmost, and will not bother to interfere with what women are saying and thinking with their admittedly inferior powers."

Dame Rebecca hastens to make clear that, for a number of reasons, she does not think this approach to marriage would work in the West. It depends upon too many tacit understandings that need to be entrenched in tradition. In the West, for instance, women who give up their economic and legal rights have no protection when the man leaves. "A man who is tied to one village and cannot leave his wife without leaving his land is not so dangerous a husband as a man who can step on a train and find employment in another town. . . . But the greatest objection to this artificial abjection is that it is a conscious fraud on the part of women, and life will never be easy until human beings can be honest with one another. Still, in this world of compromises, honor is due to one so far successful that it produces these grimly happy heroes, these women who stride

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and laugh, obeying the instructions of their own nature and not masculine prescription."

From the battle of Kosovo in 1389, the Yugoslavs (which means southern Slavs) and the Serbs in particular have understood themselves to be the defenders of the West against the threat of Islam. They were not always heroes, and under Slobodan Milosevic some of them have acted atrociously, but their demonization by U.S.-NATO propaganda in the last several months is as wrong as it is preposterous. *Black Lamb* helps the reader understand the thousand years of passionately entangled history into which we have been mindlessly dropping bombs. Many people, including some good friends, were loudly calling for a ground invasion with hundreds of thousands of troops, and the redrawing of national and ethnic boundaries, creating "protectorates" for which the U.S. would be responsible for decades into the future. "In war, there is no substitute for victory." "Now that we're in, we have to win." Such were among the slogans. But we were not at war. In one of the great blunders of diplomatic history, the Clinton Administration saw the threat of bombing as a bargaining chip in negotiations. At Rambouillet, Milosevic was told that if he did not sign the terms imposed by the U.S., we would bomb his country. He refused and we bombed, in the naive expectation that he would change his mind in a few days. It was apparently conceived by Madame Albright as a measure comparable to spanking a bad boy in school. The aftermath of the sorry affair and its humiliating consequences for America—patently spurious claims of "victory" notwithstanding—are now known to all.

But enough of that. The current bunglings in the Balkans provided an occasion for my going back to Dame Rebecca West's *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon*. But you do not need the excuse of another war or diplomatic calamity to avail yourself of the great pleasure and instruction of one of the great books of the century now coming to an end.

FT

THOSE UNSECULAR EVANGELICALS

Christian Smith (see "Is Private Schooling Privatizing?" April 1999) has published a book deserving of very serious attention, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (University of Chicago Press, 310 pp., $45 cloth, $16 paper). It is about American evangelicalism, of course, but also takes on much larger issues. For a long time, the spinners of theories of secularization tended to take Western Europe as the norm and to view the religious vitality of the United States as yet another aspect of "American exceptionalism." The assumption was that there is a necessary connection between modernity and secularization; the more modern a society the more secular it will become. All kinds of complicated explanations were offered to account for the anomaly of vibrantly religious America, presumably the most modern of societies. In more recent years, something like a consensus has formed that earlier theorists got it backwards. In a world that is becoming, simultaneously, more modern and more religious, the oddity to be explained is the "exceptionalism" of Western Europe, which appears to be on an unremitting course of ever greater secularization.

American Evangelicalism makes an exceedingly valuable contribution to these larger questions by offering a carefully analyzed case study of one ongoing encounter between religion and modernity. Smith, a sociologist at the University of North Carolina, comes up with almost unqualified good news for evangelical Protestants in the U.S. Based on extensive survey research by himself and others, he tells us that "modern American evangelicalism enjoys a religious vitality—measured sociologically—that surpasses every other major Christian tradition in the country." Evangelicalism is, as his subtitle puts it, "embattled and thriving"—and in some ways thriving because it is embattled.

Evangelicalism in this context is defined by several negatives. First, evangelicals are definitely Protestant, which means they are not Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox (although Orthodoxy is not a significant presence in the minds of most evangelicals). Second, evangelicalism is not mainline or liberal Protestant. Admittedly, the line between mainline and liberal is not always clear. The Protestant mainline—now often called the oldline—is composed of those churches that, until about forty years ago, enjoyed a religio-cultural hegemony in the U.S.: Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, and Congregational. Groups traditionally called liberal, such as the Unitarian-Universalists, are small but are carriers of ideas that have made significant inroads in the mainline bodies. The third defining negative of the evangelicals is that they are not fundamentalists. The fundamentalists were the cultural losers in the modernist-fundamentalist battles fought in the early part of this century and symbolized by the Scopes "monkey trial" in Dayton, Tennessee, depicted with such devastating acidity by H. L. Mencken. After their defeat, fundamentalists went into cultural exile, to lick their wounds and exult in the purity of their separation from a world on its way to perdition.

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The story of "modern evangelicalism" began during World War II, when a number of fundamentalist leaders, led by people such as theologian Carl Henry, called for reengagement with the culture on the basis of orthodox doctrine and for the purpose of evangelizing the larger world. The cause of the old fundamentalists who were now the "new evangelicals" was represented by *Christianity Today* magazine and, above all, by the ministry, over more than four decades, of evangelist Billy Graham. Measured by the usual criteria, evangelical Protestants constitute as much as 25 percent of the American population (with Catholics and mainline Protestants having roughly comparable shares among the religiously affiliated). The usual criteria for counting someone an evangelical Protestant include: 1) a strong view of the authority of the Bible; 2) a personal experience of regeneration, or being "born again"; 3) a belief that Jesus is the only way to heaven; and 4) a commitment to "winning others for Christ."

By employing somewhat different and stricter criteria, Smith's study narrows the number of evangelicals to only 7 percent of the population. In doing so, he says he is using the self-definition of respondents in his survey, but of course he decides which self-definitions will qualify for his purposes. In any event, the evangelicalism that is "embattled and thriving" in this study is less than a third of what is ordinarily meant by evangelical Protestantism in America. This is not necessarily a weakness in the book, but it is important to keep it in mind.

The third chapter, "Explaining Religious Vitality in America," is of most particular interest. Here Smith takes on the theories and theorists that have dominated these discussions over the last fifty years and more. There is the "sheltered enclave theory" that suggests people huddle together to reinforce their beliefs and protect themselves from an unbelieving culture. The "status discontent theory" proposes that believers mobilize when their previous social standing is threatened. The "strictness theory" says that, the stricter the rules for belonging, the more coherent a group will be—and, not incidentally, the more attractive to many outsiders. This is countered in part by "rational choice" or "competitive market" theory, which argues that America has become increasingly religious with the increase of religious pluralism, thereby accenting "choice," which is the culture's chief value. Smith finally comes down in favor of a variation of the last as representing "the new paradigm" for explaining America's religious vitality.

Culture or Aggregated Individualisms?

For all the merits of *American Evangelicalism*, some rather obvious problems cannot be overlooked. Smith's approach to culture is highly individualistic, a matter of aggregating individual attitudes and opinions rather than studying the interaction of persons and communities that constitute what is ordinarily meant by a culture. This is key to Smith's running attack on a distinguished student of evangelicalism, James Davison Hunter of the University of Virginia, who in these pages and in books such as *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (1987) contends that evangelicalism is making perhaps fatal "accommodations" with secularization. Hunter is associated with the "sheltered enclave" theory, but also gives ample attention to the "cognitive bargaining" that constantly goes on between the enclave and the surrounding world. Although Smith has no theory of the development of doctrine along the lines of a John Henry Newman, he does recognize that changes and accommodations have been made by evangelicals. But he is inclined to take such changes as signs of "vitality," on the assumption of an underlying and unchanging orthodoxy of belief. This is not persuasive.

For instance, when he started out in the 1940s, Billy Graham made no bones about preaching hellfire and damnation for those who have not accepted Christ. He hasn't been featuring that for a very long time now. Not to put too fine a point on it, one may assume that Mr. Graham knows what does and what does not sell. Is this a mark of vitality or, as Hunter suggests, accommodation? It is a notable and implausible conceit of many evangelicals that they are preaching an "old time Gospel" that goes back substantively unchanged to the New Testament. Smith fails to challenge that conceit and in fact, perhaps inadvertently, tends to reinforce it. In contemporary evangelicalism, the market-driven "church growth movement," with its preoccupation with building "megachurches," has clearly relocated the center of religious authority from the pulpit to the felt needs of "seekers." Individuals may still say the same things their grandparents said about the authority of the Bible and the way of salvation, but the religio-cultural dynamics have dramatically changed. This is a dimension of evangelicalism to which Hunter pays assiduous attention but is largely missed by Smith's methodological individualism that is content to report what people say they believe.

In addition, the book's repeated assertion that evangelicalism as defined by the author is the most vibrant of America's religious communities is skewed by the criteria employed. For example, "historic Christian doctrine" is framed in distinctively evangelical terms, beginning with the authority of the Bible and including items such as having "committed one's life to Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior." If orthodoxy is defined by evangelical distinctives, it is not surprising that evangelicals come out being more orthodox. We would undoubtedly have a very different result were

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orthodoxy defined by, for example, Catholic distinctives such as, to mention a few, the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist, the pope as successor of Peter, the authority of tradition, and belief in the intercession of the saints. In fact, by some of Smith's own criteria of "vitality"—such as the retention of members—Catholics come out well ahead of the evangelicals in his study. Pushing the point a little further, one could imagine that mainline/liberal criteria of vitality—for instance, sensitivity to issues of race, class, and gender—could produce the conclusion that liberal Protestantism is the most vibrant of communities.

No Free Evenings

Smith takes it as a mark of vitality that, in addition to Sunday worship, evangelicals spend more time than other Christians at church and in church-related activities. I'm not so sure. One is reminded of Oscar Wilde's complaint about socialism and the frenetic activism of its proponents. The problem with socialism, he said, is that it leaves one with no free evenings. There are many ways of being Christian in the world; being much preoccupied with activities identified as "Christian" is only one of them. There is no doubt about the enormous institutional vitality of evangelicalism, driven by intense religious entrepreneurship in evangelism, education, publishing, and uplift programs without end. One can simply look at the massive evangelical advertising in, for instance, *Christianity Today*. It seems that almost everybody is hawking some new wrinkle on that "old time Gospel." But I believe James Hunter is right in sensing something frenetic, even desperate, in the multiplication of these enterprises and the tone in which they are pitched. The more thoughtful and theologically attuned voices in evangelicalism suggest with increasing urgency that there is a connection between intensified marketing and a sense that evangelicalism has lost its direction.

American Evangelicalism supplies many and sometimes important surprises. For instance, Smith's "7 percent evangelicals" are, in absolute numbers, mainly in the Northeast and, especially, in the Upper Midwest—not in the South and Southwest, as the conventional view would suggest. For another instance, Smith's evangelicals are, by some measures of evangelical Protestant orthodoxy, frequently more orthodox than their fundamentalist cousins. The reason, Smith plausibly proposes, is that evangelicals are in regular engagement with those who do not share their beliefs, which requires them to think more carefully about what it is that they do believe. The more insular fundamentalists, on the other hand, live in their own and less troubled world, which is conducive to shared belief being taken for granted and becoming flaccid.

Throughout his argument, Smith treats evangelicalism as an "embattled and thriving" subculture. This is crucial. Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923) famously distinguished religious groups along the lines of three models—church, sect, and mysticism. Smith's evangelicalism is of the sect model, although in the background assumptions about individual experience and attitude there is an element of mysticism, understood as the "gnosticism" described in Harold Bloom's *The American Religion* (1992). Years earlier, in 1969 to be precise, sociologist Peter Berger, a mentor and colleague of James Davison Hunter, wrote about secularization as the loss of "the sacred canopy," by which he meant an overarching religious belief system that provides personal and communal meaning. Smith agrees that our culture may have lost the sacred canopy, but offers the piquant suggestion that people now put up their own "sacred umbrellas," which work just fine. Perhaps so, but the umbrella image does suggest that the storm of secularization is very real, and finally does not seem that different from Hunter's "sheltered enclave."

Make no mistake about it, however: *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* is a book very much worth reading. Christian Smith takes on the big questions, and I believe his intuition is right that there is no necessary connection between modernity and secularization, and that America should be seen more as the norm than as the exception in thinking about the religious future of the world. If his argument is not as convincing as his intuition is sound, I believe the reason is to be found in an evangelical Protestant bias that too often comes close to special pleading. That being said, *American Evangelicalism* both provokes and informs, and is a most welcome contribution to understanding important aspects of our religious situation.

FT

THE "AUTONOMY" OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ST. DYMPNA

The scholarship of Father James Burtchaell, author of *The Dying of the Light* (see review by John Peter Kenney, FT, October 1998), has made an inestimable contribution to the cause of keeping Christian schools Christian. Writing on the apostolic constitution *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, which will be a major subject for the meeting of Catholic bishops this fall, Burtchaell notes in *Crisis* magazine the curious insistence of some college and university

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administrators that any accountability to the Church will compromise their institutions' independence and integrity. But let Fr. Burtchaell tell it. (St. Dympna is a seventh-century Belgian martyr and patroness of the mentally disordered.)

The presidents have been so accustomed to trumping with the dogma of "institutional autonomy" that they have evidently not realized the absurdity of their repeated claim that no "outside authority" could hold their institutions answerable. Take, as typical, the well respected University of St. Dympna. The first outside authority to which she regularly defers is the Federal Government, incarnate in the Departments of State, Justice, Education, Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Energy, Health and Human Services, Labor, and Veterans Affairs; also the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Library of Congress, the U.S. Patent Office, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowments for the Humanities and for the Arts, the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Washington forbids her to ask the race of applicants, but requires her to report the racial breakdown of her personnel and students; makes it worth her while to include in every employment notice the assurance that she is an equal opportunity employer; forbids her to save the trees on her campus by spraying DDT; determines and inspects the housing for her laboratory animals (which therefore costs roughly twice as much per square foot as faculty office space); requires protection of all human subjects of any funded research, subject to elaborate guidelines and reporting; requires a minimum number of credit hours to be taken by students receiving tuition grants or guaranteed loans; and regulates the emissions from the power plant.

A typical professor of biology, for instance, might answer to the American Heart Association which funds his research, the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care which is licensed under the Department of Agriculture, the National Institutes of Health, and the National Science Foundation to ensure that his rats are well cared for; the Environmental Protection Agency which superintends his disposal of their bodies; the Department of Energy which governs his usage and storage of radioisotopes; the Department of Transportation which must issue a clearance for him to ship pathogens; the Office of Safety and Health Administration which monitors the safety of his technicians; the Immigration and Naturalization Service which must always be apprised of the status of foreign nationals collaborating in his research; the Department of Labor which requires proof that no qualified citizen is available before it will agree to a visa to a foreign national; and the National Institutes of Health which provide norms to the internal Human Subjects Committee that must give appropriate projects ethical approval.

The Comptroller of the Currency regulates the faculty credit union. The Library of Congress certifies copyrights to faculty members and sets standards for the book cataloguing. The U.S. Army and the U.S. Navy decide what facilities are required by their ROTC programs on campus. And obviously there is the jurisdiction of the courts.

This is, of course, only a small and suggestive sample of the federal authorities to which St. Dympna defers. The North Central Association, her regional accrediting agency, develops multiple standards or expectations regarding advanced placement, exceptions for athletes, adequacy of research funding, expenditures on library materials, allowable retirement ages, obligatory amenities for the disabled, proportion of faculty on leave, management of financial aid to veterans, economic stability and management of long-term debt, mandatory insurance coverage, participatory decision-making, the academic calendar, integration of professional with academic programs, the rights of various employee groups to require collective bargaining, adequacy of funding for new degree offerings, languages to be used in instruction, etc.

In addition, St. Dympna must face the regularly recurring scrutiny of specialized accrediting agencies: the National Association of Schools of Music, the Association of Theological Schools in the United States and Canada, the American Psychological Association, the American Chemical Society, the American Bar Association, the Association of American Law Schools, the Committee on Allied Health Education and Accreditation of the American Medical Association, the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Engineering Technology, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, the Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers. The Financial Accounting Standards Board has set the parameters and format for her financial statements. The National Collegiate Athletic Association feigns to regulate the amount of practice time before the beginning of the academic year, all financial adhesions of varsity athletes, the authenticity of their academic progress, and variances in their class attendance due to events away from campus. ETS and ACT largely shape the comparative assessment of prospective freshmen and of their high schools, and the linguistic competence of applicants for whom English is not their first language.

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The county health department has regulations governing burials on campus, and inspects the dining facilities. The fire inspector regularly prowls the physical plant and growls at code violations. The building inspectors have to sign off on all construction projects, and the zoning people will claim a say if the campus begins to creep in any direction. The county prosecutor decides which student misbehavior will be dealt with officially, which unofficially, and which not at all.

These are some of the external authorities or agencies to which St. Dympna is answerable for her various standards. She is also a party to policy-setting by the American Council on Education, the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities (which sometimes forgets that it too is an outsider to its member campuses), the State Conference on Higher Education, the Association of College and Research Libraries, the Association of American Colleges and Universities, and the Council of Graduate Schools, and generally expects to abide by the norms they adopt. To quote the Letter to the Hebrews, "What more shall I say?" The point is clear. No university is an asteroid. It is an organic member of a complex, very endocrine community.

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AGAINST NEOLIBERALISM

"Fr. Neuhaus Should Withdraw his Book" is the heading of a five-page attack on *Appointment in Rome: The Church in America Awakening* by the editors of the (Houston) *Catholic Worker*. My book, claim Mark and Louise Zwick, "can only be considered a counter document to that of Pope John Paul II," referring to his apostolic exhortation, *Ecclesia in America*. The Pope's exhortation is the official message of the Synod for America held at the end of 1997 and was delivered in Mexico City this past January. My book, say the editors, "presents a view shockingly different from that of the Holy Father." There is neither reason nor space to respond to the numerous criticisms offered by the editors. The easy thing to do is to observe that the Pope has read *Appointment in Rome* and praised it highly, for which I am very grateful. I could just leave it at that, but the *Catholic Worker* and the movement it represents, founded by the great Dorothy Day and her mentor Peter Maurin, continue to be an inspiration for many, and the editors' charges are, at least for that reason, deserving of some response.

The Zwicks begin their extended essay with embarrassingly flattering remarks about this author, but that is an obvious set-up to explain their great disappointment with me. With a reading of the subtext that is worthy of the more fevered disciples of Leo Strauss, they explain that I am really a "Calvinist" after all because I suggest that Max Weber was on to something with his suggested connection between "the Protestant ethic" and economic enterprise. As a Catholic, my problem is that I "attached [myself] to the thought of John Courtney Murray, S.J., who, with the best of intentions, exacerbated the dualism between faith and everyday life, faith and economics, faith and education, faith and culture which has plagued Christianity since the reformation." Apart from how one could do such bad things with the best of intentions, this will come as astonishing news to students of Murray who celebrate his pioneering work, also at Vatican Council II, in bringing Catholic social doctrine into firm alliance with democratic freedom and justice. Perhaps scholars have overlooked the insidious Calvinist influences in Murray's background as well.

The Zwicks' essay is an extended polemic against neoconservatism, a.k.a. neoliberalism, a.k.a. capitalism. So, as might be expected, Michael Novak, George Weigel, and Father Robert Sirico come in for very unfavorable mention. The neoliberalism supported by this writer and his friends, say the editors, "mows down people who are in other countries through slave wages, international trade agreements and torture taught at the School of the Americas to ensure that 'freedom' prevails. It is very violent." But the Zwicks go beyond the usual suspects. They write, "Another well-respected priest, Fr. Avery Dulles, S.J., defends slave wages as being better than no wages." Fr. Dulles is not simply a well-respected priest, he is undoubtedly the most widely respected Catholic theologian in the United States (to whom, not incidently, *Appointment in Rome* is dedicated). And, if one really wanted to press the point, might one not be able to make the case that low wages, even very low wages, are better than no wages at all? But, in fact, what the *Catholic Worker* says is false.

Fr. Dulles tells me that he remembers meeting the Zwicks at a meeting in Washington and, in private conversation, asked them what they thought of the argument of an acquaintance of his who does business in Latin America and claims that, although the wages he pays are low by North American standards, they are much higher than his workers could otherwise obtain. He says he does not recall how the Zwicks responded to his question, if they did. Since then, however, they have more than once published the claim that Fr. Dulles "defends slave wages" in Latin America. Such libel does nothing to enhance the legacy of Dorothy Day which the *Catholic Worker* supposedly champions.

In *Appointment in Rome*, the Zwicks write, "Fr.

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Neuhaus forgot to point out, as the Pope did, that the 'constant dedication to the poor and disadvantaged emerges in the Church's social teaching, which ceaselessly invites the Christian community to a commitment to overcome every form of exploitation and oppression.'" It is hardly surprising that I should forget to point that out, if, as alleged, I am in favor of slave wages and torture. But of course there is no disagreement with the Pope on the commitment to the poor. The disagreement is between the *Catholic Worker*'s position that the poor are to be liberated through class struggle and resentment, on the one hand, and the Pope's position that the poor are to be helped to become nonpoor by expanding the circle of productivity and exchange, on the other.

"Fr. Neuhaus," we are told, "forgot to include this vision of love of the poor and the suffering in *Appointment in Rome*, as he encouraged joining forces with fundamentalists in what they sometimes call a theology of prosperity." There is nothing in the book about a "theology of prosperity," but there is a great deal about the initiative "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" and what it could mean also for Latin America. And I do note the many scholars who have suggested that there is a connection between evangelical missions in Latin America and the encouragement of economic enterprise. The *Catholic Worker* seems to be of the view that the authentically Catholic position is one of being in love with being in love with the poor and the suffering. The course of love, I would suggest in agreement with Catholic doctrine, is to do all we can to remedy poverty and suffering.

The editors declare themselves deeply disturbed about my book's "mocking" the Latin American bishops. I do have some candid, and I thought humorous, observations about bishops at the Synod, from both the North and the South, who apparently thought they were doing their duty by the poor by reiterating weary slogans from now moribund liberation theologies. From my acquaintance with Dorothy Day, I think she would have appreciated the humor, which is obviously lost on those who purportedly keep her flame. In any event, I am pleased to report that a number of Latin American bishops who have read the book in English and praised it highly are eagerly awaiting the Spanish edition and intend to give it the widest possible circulation.

So what is one to make of the nastiness perpetrated by the *Catholic Worker*? Because of the vestigial connection with the much admired Dorothy Day, a general inclination is to cut a lot of slack for those who claim to be her heirs. As a friend says, "Of course what they say about economics and politics is mostly nonsense, but they are idealists and they keep the rest of us honest." It is a benign view, but I cannot agree. Nobody is kept honest by their dishonesty, by their attempt to ideologically hijack Catholic social teaching, or by their misrepresenting of those with whom they disagree. That is not idealism. It is moral posturing that serves no purpose other than the inflation of self-esteem as people of ever so superior sensitivity to the sufferings of the poor. It is one of the things we must move beyond if we are to move toward what the Synod and John Paul II call us to—"An Encounter with the Living Jesus Christ, the Way to Conversion, Communion, and Solidarity in America."

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CROSSING THE CIVILITY LINE

I run no risk of surprising the reader when I say that I am not opposed to a little spirited polemic from time to time. But polemic, too, should be within the bounds of civility. A civil polemic leaves something to be said in response by the object of the polemic; it does not stop the conversation. The line of civility is not easily defined in the abstract, but you usually know when it has been crossed.

For instance, in this article by the celebrated gay playwright Tony Kushner published in the *Nation* and reprinted in *Harper's*. Kushner writes: "Pope John Paul II endorses murder. . . . The Pope and his cardinals and bishops and priests maintain their cynical, political silence. Rigorously denouncing the abuse and murder of homosexuals would be a big sin against spin, denouncing the murder of homosexuals in such a way that it received even one-thousandth of the coverage his and his Church's attacks on homosexuals routinely receive would be an act of decency the Pope can't afford, for the Pope knows: behind this one murdered kid stand legions of kids whose lives are scarred by the bigotry this Pope defends as Sanctioned by God." And again: "The Pope, in his new encyclical, *Fides et Ratio* ('Faith and Reason'), laments the death of civil discourse and cites 'ancient philosophers who propose friendship as one of the most appropriate contexts for sound philosophical inquiry.' Tell you what, Your Holiness, take the gun away from my head, and we can discuss the merits of homosexual sex, homosexual marriage, abortion, anything you like. A lot of people worry these days about the death of civil discourse and would say that I ought not to call the Pope a homicidal liar nor (to be ecumenical about this) the orthodox rabbinate homicidal liars nor Trent Lott a disgusting, opportunistic hate-monger. But I worry a lot less about the death of civil discourse than I worry

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about being killed if, visiting the wrong town with my boyfriend, we forget ourselves so much as to betray, at the wrong moment in front of the wrong people, that we love each other."

Succumbing once again to my propensity for fairness, I speculate that perhaps the editors of *Harper's* reprinted Kushner's vituperation precisely in order to underscore the point about civility made at the beginning. There is no evidence of that, however, and I would be reluctant to attribute to *Harper's*, in a fit of excessive charity, motives that are not their own. What can be said with near irrefutable certainty is that a diatribe of the same tone as Kushner's but by an opponent of the homosexual agenda would certainly not be printed in the *Nation* or in *Harper's* without its being very clearly indicated that it illustrates the violent extremism of those with whom they disagree.

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TIME FOR A STEP FURTHER

The criticism of CCHD is fine so far as it goes, says an old hand at inner-city community organizing here in New York, but it doesn't go far enough. CCHD is, of course, the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. In response to critics, the word Catholic was recently added to the name in order to indicate that it is, well, Catholic. The aforementioned old hand doesn't think it means very much. He criticizes the critics of CCHD for concentrating on those cases where funding is given to organizations that directly violate the Church's teaching, notably on abortion. The problem with that, says our old hand, is that it segregates the "life questions" from the fullness of the Church's social teaching, giving the impression that abortion and a few other things are no more than Catholic "hang-ups" to which those receiving Catholic money need to be sensitive.

In an earlier life long ago, before he was converted to the gospel of life, our old hand was an executive with Planned Parenthood. That organization, he notes, would never dream of giving support to a group that did not back its entire agenda, and it is assumed that when a major lobbying effort is needed PP will call in its chits. Not so with Catholics. Through CCHD many millions of dollars are given each year to organizations that, while avoiding the hang-up questions, are indifferent and frequently hostile to the Church's mission. In inner-city community organizing, Catholics provide, in addition to the funding, the great majority of the people and the bulk of parish-based institutional support.

Our old hand thinks part of the problem is with the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF), an effort launched more than thirty years ago by the late Saul Alinsky of Chicago, who made no secret of his strategy of hijacking the resources of the Catholic Church for his self-declared revolution. IAF is, under various names, still very much a force in community organizing around the country. But why are Catholic dioceses and CCHD so hesitant to insist that assisted programs be commensurate with Catholic support and teaching? Part of the answer is a good ecumenical impulse gone awry. In many urban areas, liberal Protestant churches are a small minority in community coalitions but exercise a large influence, often because Catholics don't want to offend them by pressing issues such as support for crisis pregnancy centers or opposition to partial-birth abortion. Another part of the answer is that it is naively assumed that more "inclusive" groups will more impartially serve "the common good," when, in fact, any viable organization has its particular goals—a.k.a. "interests"—for good or ill.

The Catholic interest, one might suggest, is to serve the common good, as that is richly and amply defined in the Church's social doctrine. But to insist on that requires a measure of confidence in that doctrine, and such confidence is in short supply. The World Council of Churches had the slogan "The world sets the agenda for the Church." There is an analogue in the Catholic understanding that grace perfects nature and, by extension, the Church's mission is to support the good things already happening under other auspices. There is important truth in these claims, of course. But they are truths too easily subverted and turned to alien purposes when the Church's people and resources are placed at the disposal of those who define the good in ways that are frequently unsympathetic to or at odds with the Church's teaching. So what our old hand is suggesting is that the criticism of some of the more egregious abuses in CCHD funding is having its effect, and that's good. But now it's time to go further and make the case that the "Catholic" in the Catholic Campaign for Human Development should indicate more than the source of the monies and other resources employed. It should be an honest indicator of all the ends to which they are employed.

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GAMBLING WITH GAMING

We're willing to wager that you have mixed feelings about gambling. It's hard to imagine what's so

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objectionable about going to the racetrack on a Saturday afternoon to see the thoroughbreds on the misty green and enjoy a bowl of bread pudding with bourbon sauce, the classic Kentucky racetrack dessert. On the other hand, it's not a particularly constructive pastime, and it results in places like Las Vegas. The Hon. Frank R. Wolf of the House of Representatives (Virginia) recently offered Congress a few more compelling reasons to challenge the gambling industry. For starters, it has spread like wildfire through our country in the last twenty years, legal now in forty-eight states, but it appears most often on Native American reservations—and gambling in those communities is as severe a plague as alcohol once was, and still is.

The rest of the population is hardly immune to the ill effects of gambling, though. Senior citizens in particular tend to be lured by bingo, making it one of the most popular activities in their age group and consequently a common cause of their financial ruin. At the other end of the scale, children are being targeted by casinos. "Family-friendly" enterprises offer arcade games to kids that get them hooked on the gambling high early in life, to such an extent that in places such as Louisiana, according to those who have studied the matter, one in seven 18-to-21-year-olds already has chronic gambling problems. Likewise it is alive and well in nearly every New Jersey high school, frequently backed by organized crime.

Gambling also hurts communities as a whole. Along with casinos come crime, gambling addictions, bankruptcy, and a higher rate of suicide. If that weren't enough, the powerful gambling lobbies have managed to corrupt the political process, since their financial influence far outweighs that of grassroots action by families and neighborhoods to keep gambling out.

In the 1998 elections, especially in the South, a number of key congressional and gubernatorial races were, it is generally agreed, decided by gambling issues such as state lotteries and legalizing casinos. The anti-gambling candidates, swamped by money from "gaming" interests (they much prefer "gaming" to "gambling"), went down to defeat. The Democratic Party is fast adding to its other lovely attributes that of being gigolo to Lady Luck. There is a further corruption of government involved, especially with state-sponsored lotteries and other gambling. It's a cheap and dishonest way of raising money. States typically claim that gambling revenues go to "education" and other motherhood programs, but it is simply a device for exploiting human weaknesses to generate funds that the government can slush where it will. It is taxation by another name, but taxation of the vulnerable, and taxation without accountability, which is another form of taxation without representation—which was once in American history a matter of lively concern. One raises this protest in fear and trembling, knowing that critics may take it as further evidence that this publication is, according to Andrew Sullivan who calls it "the spiritual nerve center of the new conservatism," promoting "neo-Puritanism." In view of the innumerable people and the public integrity that are at risk, we'll take that risk. And thank Congressman Wolf once again for his leadership.

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THE THIRD WAY, FOR THE UMPTEENTH TIME

Al Gore wants everyone to win, and he has some ideas about how to make that happen. David Blankenhorn of the Institute for American Values summarizes his plan. "In a recent speech to the Democratic Leadership Council," Blankenhorn writes, "Vice President Al Gore firmly embraced what growing numbers of political strategists, both in the U.S. and abroad, call 'third way' thinking. As the Vice President put it, the basic idea is to go 'beyond the false divisions and dichotomies of the past.' For third way thinkers, the answer to most questions is not one conventional position or the other but a new blending of positions. What we typically face today are not zero-sum conflicts, requiring us to make decisions that necessarily produce winners and losers, but rather tensions that can be solved creatively in ways that permit everyone to win."

Gore is thinking specifically of how families in which both parents work can win. Blankenhorn continues: "The Vice President is putting two propositions on the table. The first is that corporate-sponsored child care programs—the Administration currently recommends new tax breaks for corporations that provide day care for children of employees—are both good for business and good for children and families. The second is that 'two-paycheck and time-off' families deserve public support because they 'really' exist, whereas the family type consisting of employed father and at-home mother 'no longer exists.'

"These two propositions are closely connected, since accepting the latter is a precondition for defending the former. After all, some people might worry about the fairness of using public policy to subsidize the child care choices of some families, while effectively punishing the choices of others. But you can't unfairly discriminate against a family form that 'no longer exists.' The only two-parent

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families that we have left, according to the Vice President, are those two-earner couples in which one parent (thanks to Family and Medical Leave) can take time off for a few weeks or months when the baby is born, then start 'juggling day care,' preferably with the assistance of an employer-sponsored child care program.

"This is weak stuff. In the United States today, about half of all preschool children are cared for during the day by their mothers. Another 25 percent or so are cared for by fathers or other family members. Day care centers account for about 15 percent of all preschoolers; the rest are cared for by babysitters and other non-relatives. Among all married couples in the U.S. with at least one preschooler, only about one of every three mothers works full time outside of the home. Among all families with young children, those whom the Vice President describes as no longer existing, and therefore irrelevant for public policy, are in fact the largest single demographic group."

It's not just a matter of demographic ignorance, though. There's something else at work here. Blankenhorn writes: "Instead of 'win-win,' think of most of these programs as intended to support one side in a battle. The battle being waged is for the time and attention of parents. One side consists of employers. The opposing side consists of children. More for one side means less for the other. Less absenteeism at work necessitates more absenteeism at home. In this generation, guess which side is winning? And guess who is cheering the winning side on, insisting that they deserve even more public money, all the while pretending, as if saying it made it so, that the conflict does not exist? None other than the leader-in-waiting of the very political party which, last time I checked, was supposed to be at least a little suspicious of the idea that whatever is good for big business must also be good for ordinary people." The suspicion is once again confirmed: Those who talk about a third way are usually saying that we should do things their way.

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"A RIGHTEOUS MAN IN HIS TIME"

Hackles were raised when the Israeli ambassador to the Holy See delivered, on behalf of his government, the judgment that the cause of Pope Pius XII should not proceed toward beatification and canonization until questions had been satisfied regarding his alleged failure to do all he should have done on behalf of Jews during the Holocaust. It struck some as an egregious instance of presumption (there is a fine Yiddish word for that) to suggest that Jews in general, or Israel in particular, should have veto power over whom the Church acknowledges as a saint. A priest in Rome who is defending the beatification of Pius did not help matters with an outburst against Jewish influence and a proposal that maybe it is time for the Church to examine Jewish attacks against Christianity through the centuries. That *tu quoque* reaction is logically fallacious and reflects a defensiveness hardly in keeping with John Paul II's call for a healing of memories at the threshold of the third Christian millennium.

A thoughtful reflection on this controversy is offered by Rabbi Albert Friedlander of the Reform synagogue of Westminster in London. Writing in the *Tablet*, he indicates his uneasiness about playing the devil's advocate, the biblical accuser usually played, as in the Book of Job, by Satan. But he does think we must together ask the question, "Who is a saint in the time of evil?" Rabbi Friedlander writes: "The rabbis take the Genesis text, 'And Noah was a righteous man in his time,' and examine it closely. Does 'in his time' suggest that the standards of righteousness were much lower: that anyone who was not totally evil could be called righteous? Or does it mean that in such an evil time anyone fighting evil had to be particularly good? The end decision was in Noah's favor, even though his actions after leaving the ark cause much concern. In the time of the Nazis, we find a similar situation: does silence or indirect action when one does not put one's life at risk constitute the moral resistance required? Many individuals had to make that choice. As I have already said, there were moral failures among the victims as well. But I am concerned with the apathetic onlookers. Does not 'sainthood,' by contrast, indicate a superhuman effort? Standing on the outside, I would not and should not act as a judge. But I must ask the Church to reassess its conscience, particularly if it wants to be a teacher and witness to everyone."

His last point in particular must, I think, be taken very seriously. What the Catholic Church does is not just an "internal" matter of interest to Catholics and other Christians. The Church's actions speak to everyone, and, for reasons both historical and theological, we must be especially alert to how they speak to Jews. I hold no brief one way or the other with respect to the beatification of Pius XII. However, the subject of the Church and the Holocaust and, more inclusively, Christianity and the Holocaust, has been a subject of intense interest to me over the years. I have had occasion to study and write about it more than I want to remember. My own judgment is that Pius was a great, holy, tormented, and sometimes courageous man whose

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decisions may sometimes have erred on the side of caution, but whose intentions were always and luminously honorable. Whether he should be formally celebrated as a saint is for others to determine. But there is no reason for Catholics to be apologetic about him. Quite the contrary. Nor should we hesitate to make clear that the slandering of his memory since Rolf Hochhuth's 1963 play *The Deputy* is despicable.

Certainly Rabbi Friedlander is not guilty of that. He is asking a serious question to which we must attend if we want the Church to be "a teacher and witness to everyone": "Who is a saint in the time of evil?" His implied answer is not persuasive, however. Thank God, there were those who publicly resisted the Nazi regime and paid with the price of their lives. One thinks, for instance, of the Lutheran pastor and theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who joined the plot to overthrow the regime and was executed on the direct orders of Hitler on April 9, 1945. But was this course morally mandatory for everyone? Surely there were saints in that time of evil who did not engage in active resistance and who did not die as martyrs. The Church has in fact beatified and canonized such, and there were no doubt many more, as there are in every time, who will never receive formal recognition. Sainthood has to do with holiness—the actualizing of God's grace in our lives—and there are many paths of holiness other than public moral witness, never mind political action. There were, in that time of evil, mothers, fathers, doctors, contemplatives, scholars, priests, and others who were saints in their faithful pursuit of the course to which they believed God called them.

Friedlander writes, "The dark history of the time of the Holocaust is the backcloth to any assessment of individuals during that testing period." The backcloth, yes, but let it be said, at the risk of being misunderstood, that the Holocaust was not the only thing that was happening from 1942 to 1945. The sun also rose on days when there were prayers to be said, wounded to be cared for, courses to be taught, music to be played, and children to be fed. No doubt many who attended to these and other duties were saints. Holiness is an everyday thing. The Holocaust is in our culture the only uncontested icon of absolute evil. It ought not to be, but it is. Analogies should be indulged with caution, yet there are other historical periods of testing which likewise should not be made the litmus test of holiness.

Thoreau declared that a prison is "the only house in a slave State in which a free man can abide with honor." He had all the makings of a self-righteous prig and, in fact, did not abide in prison very long. During the halcyon days of the civil rights movement, some of us were in and out of jail for acts of civil disobedience and were lionized for it, at least within the movement. It was frequently said then that only time in jail could certify the authenticity of one's concern for racial justice. That, too, was self-righteous priggery. Today there are those who say, with considerable justice, "The dark history of the time of the abortion slaughter is the backcloth to any assessment of individuals during this testing period." They believe, with reasonable hope, that a day will come in which we will look back upon this period in the same horror with which we now look upon slavery, segregation, and, yes, the Holocaust. In the last quarter century, in this country alone, more than thirty million babies have been killed. Countless people have selflessly devoted almost the entirety of their lives to protesting this great evil; many have been and some still are in prison. Yet would we say that during this quarter century there have been no saints except for those engaged in anti-abortion activism? I think not.

Were the Holocaust the only test of the holiness of Pius XII, it is possible that he may have failed, although I would not presume to say so. But the Holocaust, unspeakable horror though it was, is not the only test. No evil, not even an evil so great as the Holocaust, can be permitted an imperious claim that eclipses all the goodness, truth, and beauty that shines through the darkest hour in lives of holiness. Whether or not Pius XII was a saint, God knows; and in due course He may permit the Church to know as well. We can await the determination of that in patience; and in the hope that, if it is decided that he was, that decision will be communicated in a way that is persuasive to those who want the Church "to be a teacher and witness to everyone." This assumes that Rabbi Friedlander and those who raise similar concerns really want the Church to be that.

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WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Regrettably, I had a conflict and couldn't make it, but I was impressed by the elegant invitation: "The Foundation for Academic Standards & Tradition requests the pleasure of your company at the First Annual Dinner in honor of Herbert I. London." I agree that Herb London is a worthy man, but every year?

■ First Robert Louis Wilken wrote an article in *Communio* called "In Dominico eloquio" about the interpretation of Old Testament passages in biblical studies. Then Richard B. Hays of Duke responded with approval to his article but wondered if perhaps Wilken discounted the benefits to be gained by the historical-critical method. Now Wilken replies to

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Hays, appreciative of the gains made by historical criticism but offering an insightful corrective to its excesses. "The history that was the key to the Scripture," Wilken writes, "was the history of Christ. If Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah, and the 'end of the ages' had arrived, it was the task of biblical interpreters to discover what the ancient scriptural words and promises meant in light of this new fact." This, he says, is no longer the case with a great many theologians. "[F]ew biblical scholars are willing to make the move from the historical setting of the biblical text to the Church's reception and use of the Bible. And when the attempt is made it often seems arbitrary and forced because the historical interpretation remains authoritative. The spiritual reading appears to be an unwelcome appendage. Though I agree with Hays that a theological interpretation of the Bible cannot ignore the historical setting, as long as the historical reading of the Scriptures is considered normative—as it is by most biblical scholars today—little advance will be made. How differently would one go about the task of interpretation if historical study of the Scriptures was preparatory and the spiritual meaning was the goal of interpretation." He concludes with a noteworthy historical by-the-way: "In my reading of the history of Christianity, the Reformation is an event in medieval history, hence Luther and Calvin stand in the medieval tradition of biblical interpretation. . . . They were not historical critics and the excesses of modern historical criticism do not have their origins in their writings." For them, as for the Great Tradition before them, the spiritual meaning was the goal.

■ Mark Silk, the editor of a new quarterly called *Religion in the News*, writes, "The creation of dozens of new and expanded religion sections over the past few years has generally included moving the religion beat out of news departments and into feature sections. Religion, newspapers seem to be saying, has to do with human interest, not public business. This is ironic, because it was the irruption of religion into politics that attracted editors' attention to religion in the first place." But Silk suspects that something big is afoot. "Since the beginning of the republic, religion in American public life has ebbed and flowed through a succession of 'disestablishments' and 're-establishments.'" The most recent disestablishment happened in the sixties. "Now," Silk says, "the next establishment may be at hand." To subscribe to *Religion in the News*, call (860) 297-2353.

■ Seventy-five years is a long time for any magazine. FT will, *Deo volente*, reach that venerable age in the year 2065. *Commonweal* is already there and its year-long celebration will include an anthology of its best this fall. Along the way, the editors are running little snippets "From the Archives," such as this on "Religion and Sex" by G. K. Chesterton, which appeared in November 1924: "Stated in human terms the plan is substantially this. That love which makes youth beautiful, and is the natural spring of so much song and romance, has for its final aim and issue a creative act, the founding of a family. While it is a creative act like that of an artist it is also a collective act like that of a small community. It is, perhaps, the one artistic work in which collaboration is a success and indeed a necessity. It takes two to make a quarrel. It also takes two to make a lovers' agreement that their love shall be put before their quarrels. But by definition the agreement of the two is not merely the concern of the two, but, in a very terrible sense, of others. The founding of a family, like all creative acts, is an awful responsibility. In other words, the founding of a family means the feeding of a family, the training, teaching, and watching of a family. It is a work for a lifetime, and most married lives are too short for it. This continuity is secured not by 'marriage laws,' which our modern plutocracies can pull about as they please, but by a voluntary vow or invocation of God made by both parties, that they will help each other in this work until death. For those who believe in God and also believe in the meaning of words, it is final and irrevocable." More final and irrevocable than the publication of magazines, one might add, but to *Commonweal, ad multos annos.*

■ Patricia Dixon was a minister's wife before the family entered the Catholic Church, and she has decided views on the proposal that priests should be allowed to be married. Including this: "It is a fact that most Christians see their clergy as men set apart, not quite 'real people,' regardless of the steps the minister or priest takes to counteract that view. This impression, strong in Protestant churches, is even stronger among Catholics, because Catholic priests *are* set apart by their ordination in a way Protestant ministers are not. This sense of separateness extends to the pastor's family. A minister's wife who is pregnant may find that church members are uncomfortable with her as a living symbol of the pastor's active sexuality; a minister's children often find the expectation that they will be models of good behavior, piety, and academic achievement a crushing burden. Close friendships within the church can prove impossible to establish, depriving the pastor's family of the bonds with other Christians so important to spiritual growth. The difference between the Protestant and Catholic understandings of ordination means that a priest's family would suffer this isolation to an even greater degree than a Protestant minister's family does. In discussing the need for more vocations, it is easy to offer facile solutions, to say that many more young men would become priests if priests could be married. There is

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little evidence to support this contention; but even if it were true, the cure would be worse than the disease."

■ James Wood, a senior editor at the *New Republic*, comes back to it again. As noted here, he last year wrote in *TNR* about his inability to believe in a powerful and merciful God who permits so much evil to exist. The arguments about theodicy are hoary, and Wood adds nothing new to them, but he does now supply an autobiographical bite that is helpful in understanding his obsession. "The dilemma was the torment of my adolescent years, which were spent in a sternly Christian and evangelical environment. My youth was full of anxious ambitions of atheism. I used to write down all the reasons for God's existence on one side of the paper and all the arguments against on the other side." James Wood is perhaps suffering from what I have called "the narrow escape syndrome," which means defining one's life by a narrow escape from a stifling childhood religion, and by the fear that the escape is not entirely successful. He discusses a new book by novelist Reynolds Price, *Letter to a Man in the Fire*, that attempts to reconcile our suffering with the reality of an omnipotent and merciful God. Wood is not persuaded: "When I considered these matters last year, several correspondents wrote to me to agree that this problem is an intolerable mystery but to express surprise that I leap from the stubbornness of the problem to the decision that God cannot exist. Yet it is precisely this dilemma, of all, that should prompt such blasphemy. One can either, like Price, confess the intolerable mystery, and then assert by circular, if anguished, thought that we must continue to worship the God that maintains and promotes this black mystery. Or one can come to the more rational conclusion that this mystery is not soluble because one part of the calculation, God, does not belong there. What better reason, what hotter crux, is there for letting God go?" More likely, the part of the calculation that is missing is the message that the biblical God is a crucified God who accepts the unjust verdict of humanity that "God is guilty!" That truth, of course, is more mystery than calculation. The god of James Wood, like the god of David Hume, whom he cites in support of his atheism, is not the God of the Bible. As Michael Buckley persuasively argues in *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, Christians, too, do not (or should not) believe in the god in whom most atheists do not believe.

■ Pornographer Larry Flynt spoke at Georgetown University recently. The university issued the following statement: "Although Larry Flynt is speaking on campus at the request of students, Georgetown does not in any way endorse Mr. Flynt or this event. Further, we believe that Mr. Flynt's active attempt to profit by the humiliation and exploitation of women is shameful and wrong. Nevertheless, as a Catholic and Jesuit university Georgetown stands by academic freedom and the rights of students and faculty to invite speakers to campus—even speakers who are controversial or potentially offensive. In a university and in a democratic society, the best response to controversial or offensive speech is more speech, not censorship." Bishop William Lori, speaking on behalf of James Cardinal Hickey, Archbishop of Washington, issued this statement: "It is unbelievable that Georgetown University would allow our nation's premier purveyor of pornography, Larry Flynt, to speak on its campus. Mr. Flynt's appearance has nothing to do with free speech, as some may claim. No Catholic university should provide a platform which furthers the degradation of women, immoral behavior, and the antireligious opinions Mr. Flynt represents. This is utterly contrary to the Catholic identity of Georgetown University. The University's actions are indefensible." Exactly. Except it is believable. It happened. "Catholic and Jesuit" nicely nuances the distinction between an institution that is Catholic Jesuit and one that is Jesuit Catholic. The adjective is all important. I was told the other day that you can tell the kind of Jesuit you're dealing with by when he bows his head at the mention of the Society of Jesus. Some bow at "Society" and others at "Jesus." A Jesuit friend, who was not amused, tells me that is an old one. He is a *very* Catholic Jesuit.

■ The American Psychiatric Association has voted to reject any therapies that propose to heal homosexuals of their sexual dysfunction. In 1973 the APA removed homosexuality from its list of disorders, and has subsequently removed pedophilia, sadism, and masochism. Dr. Nada Stotland explained on behalf of the association's latest decision, "The very existence of therapy that is supposed to change people's sexuality, even for people who don't take it, is harmful because it implies that they have a disease. There is evidence that the belief itself can trigger depression and anxiety." There are very reputable psychiatrists who work with people in their desperate hope to overcome compulsive homosexual desires and behavior. These psychiatrists report a success rate comparable to other psychiatric therapies. The APA says such people should not be helped. They should not even know that such help is available. Their problem is, in fact, not a problem. The message from the APA, "Get used to it. Your sickness is in thinking you are sick." Such ideologically driven callousness is yet another consequence of "defining deviancy down." In this instance, deviancy is simply defined away, and anyone who challenges the new definition is defined as deviant. Don't get used to it.

■ Who, me? It is exceedingly tiresome when college

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and university administrators protest that they don't do what they so obviously do do. While effusively affirming their devotion to their "Catholic identity," they deny it by the most egregious of actions. One university president assures me that it has been made perfectly clear that this year's commencement speaker will not be "honored" in any way. What twaddle. Being chosen as commencement speaker is as great an honor as most institutions provide. Chatter about "Catholic identity" or, even more tenuously, "education in the Jesuit tradition" is, a Jewish friend observes, comparable to advertising "kosher-like" hot dogs. Few things can constitute a more explicit, in-your-face, denial of Catholic seriousness than the choice of pro-abortion commencement speakers. Chosen from among the 230-plus Catholic colleges and universities in the country, herewith commencement speakers this year who, in their political actions or public positions, are very prominent defenders of the unlimited abortion license: John Brademas at Holy Cross College, Indiana; Bill Bradley at Mount St. Clare College, Iowa; Tom Brokaw at College of Santa Fe, New Mexico; Father Robert Drinan at St. John's University Law School, New York; Michael J. Perry at St. John's University, Minnesota; Anna Quindlen at Villanova University, Pennsylvania; Garry Wills at Niagara University, New York. Said Patrick Reilly, director of the Cardinal Newman Society: "Academic freedom is no excuse for inviting graduation speakers who publicly dismiss the truth about the dignity of human life, a truth that is fundamental to the Catholic faith. The reputation gained by inviting prominent commencement speakers must not supplant the Catholic educational mission." He is right, of course, and charitable in assuming that these institutions put great stock in the Catholic educational mission. (In response to protests, Anna Quindlen withdrew at Villanova, emphasizing that her decision was "voluntary.")

■ "School vouchers will give more parents the resources and the choice to send their children to private schools. In these circumstances, more Jewish parents would be enabled to send their children to Jewish day schools. More Jewish children would then have the chance to obtain a grounding in Hebrew language, in Jewish history and ritual, and in the Bible, the Talmud, and other central texts. And this, in turn, would strengthen the Jewish community." That's Jeremy Rabkin, professor of government at Cornell. Intermarriage with non-Jews, which takes a heavy toll in children leaving the Jewish community, should be of concern, he says. According to a recent study, "Seventy-nine percent of [Jewish] day school graduates married other Jews, compared with fewer than half of those who had received only after-school instruction." Rabkin concludes: "Jewish parents who support public education for their children will still find many excellent, conventional suburban schools. But the question is whether the Jewish community has a stake in 'protecting' public education by blocking government vouchers to private and religious alternatives. How much deference should be given to the vision of a common school, when school authorities around the country are now licensing more and more diverse school options? Can it really be in the Jewish interest to see that every sort of diversity has its claim on public support—except religious diversity?" As Norman Podhoretz has observed, Jews regularly, and with justice, ask, "What's good for the Jews?"—and then promptly go out and support the opposite.

■ A Texas reader passes on an editorial in the *Houston Chronicle*, "Justice Tempered," that says it was all right for the governor of Missouri, at the Pope's request, to spare the life of a convicted murderer, and it would have been equally all right had he declined to do so. Then this: "The same latitude grants to Americans the right to worship as they please while supporting capital punishment. The Pope, who presides over a church that over the centuries executed countless souls in the name of religion before adopting a more merciful doctrine, is in a poor position to fault Americans for this characteristic moral dichotomy." That the Catholic Church executed countless people, or any people for that matter, is nonsense, but maybe the reference to "souls" has to do with something like spiritual executions. As to the moral dichotomy, maybe it is worshiping while supporting capital punishment, or worshiping as you please while supporting capital punishment, or having your mind on favorable thoughts about capital punishment while you're supposed to be worshiping, or whatever. And I thought I had it rough having to begin the day with the editorials in our parish paper.

■ The real world of politics is typically riddled with guile. Remarkably candid in that context is a letter by the president of the Massachusetts Log Cabin Club, a Republican homosexual group, to the gay newspaper *Bay Windows*, explaining how to defeat a "defense of marriage" bill that is aimed at precluding the recognition of same-sex unions as marriage. President Mark Goshko writes, "Sadly the strategy that now seems to be unfolding is playing right into our enemies' hands. The danger of this type of legislation is that on its face it merely codifies the status quo ante; and states a position that is almost universally held even by our strongest supporters. Only a tiny handful of elected officials in the entire country at this point support gay marriage. This means that we must convince otherwise supportive legislators that this kind of legislation is mean-spirited and homophobic in its

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underlying intent, and is completely unnecessary to protect heterosexual marriage. They must be made comfortable that opposing such legislation will not be viewed as equivalent to supporting gay marriage. This is a very tricky and subtle task that requires lots of quiet hand-holding, behind-the-scenes-maneuvering and calling in of chits." Goshko is hopeful that the judiciary will do their work for them, establishing same-sex marriage as a constitutional right, but gays must meanwhile apply themselves to the "very tricky and subtle task" of depicting their opponents as "mean-spirited and homophobic." He concludes his letter with this: "So let's keep our eyes on the prize and hopefully we can all get to work and bring this to a happy conclusion." The politics of happiness, anyone?

■ When more than seven hundred Anglican bishops met for the once-a-decade Lambeth Conference of 1998 they voted 526-70 (with 45 abstentions) to uphold the teaching that homosexual acts are contrary to Scripture and to firmly oppose the ordination of homosexually active priests. On the losing side was, most notably, recently retired Bishop John Spong of Newark, New Jersey. At Lambeth the bishops from Africa—where, in contrast to the Anglo-American scene, Anglicanism is thriving—took the lead in advocating classic Christian doctrine, and Spong did not help his cause by publicly complaining, in effect, that African Christians are only a generation away from swinging in the trees, and know nothing about the modern world. In his valedictory speech to the Newark diocesan convention, he told an enthusiastic crowd of eight hundred, "It is sometimes amazing how hostile and how divisive religious extremism can become." He described Lambeth as "the most disillusioning experience I have had in my entire ordained life. I never expected to see the Anglican Communion, which prides itself on the place of reason in faith, descend to this level of irrational Pentecostal hysteria." Crossroad is for some reason publishing a collection of Spong's occasional essays, memos, dinner toasts, and whatever called *The Bishop's Voice*. Spong is ever a man ahead of his time. At Lambeth, he writes, "The archbishop of Canterbury gave a talk on his vision for the church of the future. It revealed, rather, how far in the past his own life was rooted. I suspect that to the leaders of some of the undeveloped nations his words sounded visionary, but to me they were at least thirty years out of date. He and I simply do not live in the same world." Were the archbishop a thousand years out of date he might be respected as a traditionalist, but thirty years is simply an embarrassment. Perhaps part of Spong's appeal is his way with a phrase. There is this, for instance: "Until we address these issues, all that we do as a church will be akin to rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." He says he is called as a bishop to walk into the "future of our faith" and he would prefer "to walk in concert with others in the body of Christ, but if this institution is unresponsive, I am prepared to walk alone." So much for the Body of Christ. The book concludes with the assertion that "I am a Christian and I am not willing to assume that there is no way other than the way of yesterday to process the eternal Christ experience." Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever; processing the Christ experience is something else. But enough. I believe it has been some years since I have commented on Bishop Spong, yet he is a religious phenomenon of our time and his retirement should not go unremarked. In person and in his writings, he is a man of breathtaking intellectual and spiritual vulgarity. His towering self-approval, clearly intended to intimidate, only astonishes. He has succeeded, where many others have only come close, in rendering liberal religiosity immune to caricature. Pray that in his retirement there will be occasion for, if not wholehearted repentance, at least the insinuation of a doubt about the infallibility of John Shelby Spong. That could be as painful, and as salutary, as is repentance for those whom he so obviously views as lesser mortals.

■ Dave Andrusko, editor of *National Right to Life News*, notes a remarkable change at this year's big—he thinks surely more than 100,000—pro-life march on the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*. For the first time, there were no pro-choice demonstrators heckling and hectoring the marchers. Andrusko writes: "What to make of this non-appearance? A major reason, I would suggest, is that our opponents are growing weary. They have had very limited success recruiting younger women and the trendlines are not moving in their direction. Even the pro-abortion establishment is beginning to concede that attitudes are changing. While we can't look into their hearts, I have long believed that to traffic in the blood of unborn children and the misery of desperate women must sap their strength, leaving them bone-weary, riddled with guilt, and deeply unhappy. If that weren't bad enough, as they get older, holes will appear in the layers of defense mechanisms they have put on like coats to keep the chill from their hearts. Unbeckoned, memories they've managed to repress begin to invade even their dreams." He cites a recent article in *Mirabella* magazine on Kate Michelman, head of the pro-abortion NARAL. She complains about the "dangerous apathy" among pro-choicers, which is the "true enemy" of abortion rights. Michelman says, "Watered-down rhetoric may ease some of the public's squeamishness about abortion. But it does little to galvanize grassroots activism. The last national pro-choice march was seven years ago; NARAL's membership has declined significantly since the '92 elections." Good news, all

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in all. Although I hope Ms. Michelman knows that her cause has more formidable enemies than apathy.

■ The president of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc., the Rev. Henry J. Lyons, has been convicted in Florida of fraud and embezzlement involving millions of dollars, including hundreds of thousands raised a few years ago in connection with the scam alleging a national conspiracy to burn black churches. He still faces a long list of federal charges. It is one big sorry mess. The NBC has long claimed to be the largest black organization in the country, claiming 8.5 million members. Now prosecutors and others charge that those figures are grossly inflated, that the NBC may have no more than one million members. The inflated figure was used in rackets whereby Lyons sold access to the membership to corporations selling insurance, cemetery lots, and so forth. Lyons is appealing. If or when he goes to jail—and it seems more a question of when than if—he will presumably be replaced as president, but the remarkable thing is that his Florida congregation and the NBC leadership are steadfastly standing by him, apparently not so much claiming that he is innocent as that it doesn't matter. His defense attorneys repeatedly argued an overtly racist line, that what looks like fraud and extortion to others is excusable because of "cultural differences" in the black community, and especially black religion. During the Clinton era of moral degradation, no objective observer can fail to note the connection with the uncritical, apparently fanatical, support of President Clinton by blacks. Clinton is, said novelist Toni Morrison, "our first black president." It is a great sadness. The last luminous moment of liberal moral progress in American life was the civil rights movement under Martin Luther King, Jr. At that time, many people found it credible that black America would be the agent of a morally renewing—even, as some said, "redemptive"—change in our national life. That light dimmed even before Dr. King's death in 1968, and developments since then—especially the hardening of underclass crime and dependency—have been almost uniformly depressing. There is some heartening counterevidence in the form of pioneering efforts by black clergy and community leaders in programs stressing faith and self-reliance (see Daniel P. Moloney's "'Saving' the Poor," FT, May), but they face a formidable obstacle in the corruption of a black establishment represented by Henry Lyons, the leadership of the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., and others who have so wantonly betrayed the dream of Dr. King.

■ Cal Thomas, a widely syndicated columnist, and Ed Dobson, a former aide to Jerry Falwell and now a pastor in Michigan, will confuse, disappoint, and anger a good many readers with their new book, *Blinded by Might: Can the Religious Right Save America?* (Zondervan). Others will be relieved and edified. Their answer to the question in the title is emphatically in the negative. But they go further than that, coming close to contending that Christian engagement in politics is a snare and delusion. The argument is very much like what might be called, to borrow computer technology, the default position of fundamentalism/evangelicalism prior to Carl Henry's 1947 book *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism*. The only way to change the world is to save individuals one by one. *Blinded by Might* is the story of disillusioned enthusiasm. Its exposure of the hype and hubris that mark much of the "religious right" is a necessary cautionary tale. The alternative, however, is not retreat from the public square but a religiously informed public philosophy that can sustain the quest for the common good over the long haul. That was the argument of a much earlier book that Dobson wrote with Ed Hinson, *The Seduction of Power: Preachers, Politics, and the Media*. I was honored when they dedicated that book to me. It was the right argument then, and it is the right argument now. *Blinded by Might* notwithstanding, one must resist the charge of critics that evangelical Protestants are incapable of a measured appreciation of both the importance and the limits of politics.

■ A little more than three years ago Madalyn Murray O'Hair, the militant atheist who succeeded in getting prayer banned from public schools, disappeared without a trace, along with her son and granddaughter. Since there's still no sign of her, and the IRS still wants the $250,000 she owes in taxes, her personal belongings were confiscated and auctioned off in January. A separate auction will be held for her private papers, and the hottest items among those are her diaries. The few excerpts made available to the public point towards a sad, lonely, and vulgarly materialistic life. The pages not devoted to dreams of mink coats, Cadillacs, and "humiliating Billy Graham on television for money" express her despair: "The whole idiotic hopelessness of human relations descends upon me. Tonight, I cried and cried, but even then feeling nothing." Ronald Ingalls, the lawyer handling the auction of her diaries, comments that "This is more her personal stuff, her family tribulations. . . . This is not the place to come to find the fine points of her theories or logic." One might be permitted to suspect that the two are not unrelated.

■ A survey of college freshmen, conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute in California, reports that only 51 percent of those surveyed believe that abortion should be legal, down 14 percent from the early nineties. In a similar vein, only 40 percent of the freshman, a record low proportion, agreed with the proposition that "if two people really like each other, it's all right for them to have sex even if

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they've known each other for a very short time." Twenty percent of the students labeled themselves "conservative" or "far right" and 24 percent opted for "liberal" or "far left." A high of 57 percent consider themselves to be "middle of the road." Admittedly, middle of the road may be short on excitement, but, in view of the excitements recently on offer, give it a chance.

■ In my book *Dispensations: The Future of South Africa as South Africans See It* (1986), I gave major and sympathetic attention to anti-apartheid activist, the Rev. Allan Boesak, who was at the time also president of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches. I found him an extremely engaging person, but I was sharply criticized by his friends both here and there for suggesting that he had rich tastes for a proponent of a "theology of the poor." At the time, some thought Boesak a likely candidate to head up the first post-apartheid government. Then came adultery, divorce, partisan infighting, and now a prison term of six years for embezzling hundreds of thousands of dollars, donated to help the poor but used by Boesak to buy, among other things, luxury homes and a personal recording studio. It is a sad story of a hero who lost his way. The story is replicated in the lives of many leaders of movements in this country, on both the left and the right. In highly moralized struggles, both leaders and followers succumb to the error of what Shelby Steele calls virtue-by-identification, which means that personal virtue is not important as long as one is identified with the right causes. In this country it is perhaps a benefit of the last *annus horribilis* that we are newly reminded of an elementary truth that so many had apparently forgotten: character matters.

■ One gathers that the Primus of the Scottish Episcopal Church, Richard Holloway, is feeling especially good about himself. He has led a move by which his church will withdraw its funds from the Bank of Scotland because the bank is involved in an investment venture with Pat Robertson Financial Services. In reporting the story, the *Times* of London describes Robertson as "a leading figure in the American right-wing Christian Coalition, who has expressed his hatred of homosexuals, feminists, and liberals." At least that is called reporting at the *Times* of London.

■ "What is it that holds the Catholic Church together?" I was asked by an Italian journalist, who was surprised when I answered immediately, "That's easy. The Mass." More accurately, of course, Christ in the Mass. I thought of this again when reading about the "New Faith Community" started by Father James Callan after he and his followers were declared excommunicate by Bishop Matthew Clark of Rochester, New York. At their services, the breakaway community, which meets in several Protestant churches and of course insists it is still Catholic, distributes hosts consecrated at a nearby and undoubtedly Catholic parish. The New Faith Community defies the authority of the bishop, supports same-sex unions and women in the priesthood, and does much else in contradiction to Catholic teaching. But, when it comes to receiving Christ in the Eucharist, they want "the real thing." Of course, as Bishop Clark has pointed out, their position is theologically incoherent and institutionally unsustainable, for Christ in the Mass entails, inter alia, Holy Orders, and unity with the universal Church through the bishops in communion with the Petrine Ministry. Nonetheless, the intuition on which the breakaway group acts underscores what it is that holds the Church together.

■ Writing in the *New York Times Magazine* about anti-abortion activists, David Samuels says, "It is a shared if unspoken premise of the world that most of us inhabit that absolutes do not exist and that people who claim to have them are crazy." Any further questions? Or do you inhabit a world elsewhere?

■ Bill Clinton's altar boy? It sounds highly improbable, but there is this curious passage in the book by his former aide George Stephanopolous, *All Too Human*, where he describes serving as altar boy to his father, a Greek Orthodox priest: "But most of my work was backstage. Maybe one reason I've never been queasy about the grubby work of politics, the mechanics of running campaigns and making laws, is that I spent so many of my early days behind the altar screen, where mystery is rooted in the mundane, where faith and duty are one, where my father's prayers were my cues. Behind the screen, I learned to stay composed in the presence of power and was swayed by the illusion of indispensability. After all, the miracle of transubstantiation couldn't happen that Sunday if I forgot to boil water on the hot plate in the room off the altar. Altar boys are as much like young operatives as little monks. We serve the priest so he can save everyone else, doing the little things that need to be done. Sometimes I got lost in the details, lost sight of the spiritual essence of the service we were producing, but I hoped that doing the right thing in the right place at the right time would help do some good and save some souls, including my own, even when I was just doing my job."

■ Fourteen days into the U.S.-NATO bombing that precipitated a million Kosovars fleeing from the terror, president Gloria Feldt of Planned Parenthood announced the organization's funding of "reproductive health" measures for the women refugees. How very thoughtful to help ensure there will be fewer survivors of the survivors.

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■ According to ZENIT news service, a Christian radio station in California fired a disc jockey for playing John Paul II's new CD "Abba Pater." The management, it is explained, "was worried about content because they couldn't understand it." There's no telling what the Pope was trying to put over in that secret tongue, Latin.

■ Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is, with justice, acclaimed as one of the prophetic voices of the century. Herewith his comment on U.S.-NATO policy in the Balkans: "Hurling aside the United Nations and trampling its Charter, NATO proclaimed to the whole world and to the next century an ancient law—the law of the jungle: he who is mighty is completely right. If you are technically superior, excel your condemned opponent in violence a hundredfold. And they want us to live in a world like this from now on. In the sight of humanity a beautiful country is being destroyed while civilized governments applaud. And desperate people leave bomb shelters and come out as living targets to die for the salvation of Danube bridges. . . . Is this not antiquity?"

■ A passel of gimlet-eyed readers write in to protest that the May issue referred to Paul VI as Giovanni Battista Martini, when of course the family name is Montini. Some went so far as to suggest that we were, in anticipation of the next conclave, lobbying for Martini, the Cardinal Archbishop of Milan. Nothing of the sort. Even with six pairs of eyes examining two sets of proofs, these things sometimes slip by. Just as though we editors were human.

■ Johnny Wink of Arkadelphia, Arkansas, took sharp issue with my strictures regarding Charles Frazier's novel, *Cold Mountain* (Correspondence, April). I indicated he is probably right about, inter alia, the book having more than one good white male, but I really was swamped with too many things to take the time to go back and check. In response to my saying I was swamped, he kindly sent along the following excerpt from a Henry James short story, "The Great Good Place." "George Dane had opened his eyes to a bright new day, the face of nature well washed by last night's downpour and shining as with high spirits, good resolutions, lively intentions—the great glare of recommencement in short fixed in his patch of sky. He had sat up late to finish work—arrears overwhelming, then at last had gone to bed with the pile but little reduced. He was now to return to it, for the time, over the bristling hedge of letters planted by the early postman an hour before and already, on the customary table by the chimney-piece, formally rounded and squared by his systematic servant. It was something too merciless, the domestic perfection of Brown. There were newspapers on another table, ranged with the same rigor of custom, newspapers too many—what could any creature want of so much news?—and each with its hand on the neck of the other, so that the rows of their bodiless heads was like a series of decapitations. Other journals, other periodicals of every sort, folded and in wrappers, made a huddled mound that had been growing for several days and of which he had been wearily, helplessly aware. There were new books, also in wrappers as well as disenveloped and dropped again—books from publishers, books from authors, books from friends, books from enemies, books from his own bookseller, who took, it sometimes struck him, inconceivable things for granted. He touched nothing, approached nothing, only turned a heavy eye over the work, as it were, of the night—the fact, in his high wide-windowed room, where duty shed its hard light into every corner, of the still unashamed admonitions. It was the old tide rising, and it rose and rose even under the minute's watching. It had been up to his shoulders last night—it was up to his chin now." Precisely.

■ The nice thing about being an expert is that you get to define the problems that you have the expertise to fix, and thus, if you can get enough people to believe you, permanent employment is guaranteed. In what is touted as the most comprehensive American sex survey since the 1948 Kinsey Report, it is revealed in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* that 40 percent of women and 30 percent of men regularly have no interest in sex, seldom reach orgasm, "or suffer from some other sexual dysfunction." Note that those who are not interested in sex are suffering from a sexual dysfunction. One of the article's authors, Edward Laumann, a University of Chicago sociologist, said, "I think it gives us a base for explaining why we had this enormous response to Viagra." What would we do without social science? The fact that Viagra sales shot up so quickly and then went limp may give us a basis for thinking that a lot of people discovered that sex is not all it is cracked up to be. The study apparently presupposes but does not spell out the criteria of sexual non-dysfunctionality. From common sense and the literature of several millennia, my own hunch is that almost everybody is, at least during part of their lives, sexually challenged. "Over all," our experts report, "43 percent of women and 31 percent of men said they had one or more persistent problems with sex." One is reminded of the little boy in the cartoon: "I say it's spinach, and I say to hell with it." Look for a forthcoming study on the high incidence of children suffering from spinach dysfunctions.

■ The *Witness* is published by the Biblical Witness Fellowship, a renewal movement within the United Church of Christ. In answer to the question "How many mainline church leaders does it take to change a light bulb?", the editors published the following statement: "We choose not to make a statement either in favor of or against the need for a light bulb.

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However, if in your own journey you have found that a light bulb works for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb (or light source or non-dark resource), and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long life, and tinted—all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence." For some inexplicable reason, the *Witness* is regularly charged with generating more heat than light.

■ From Origen to Dante and from Immanuel Kant to C. S. Lewis, the idea of purgatory has been near irresistible. Kelton Cobb of Hartford Seminary writes, "The doctrine of purgatory is one of those wonderful excrescences of the Christian imagination. It has only the slimmest authorization in Scripture, but it is a story the very absence of which hollered out its need to be told in some form of midrash." Cobb is reviewing Richard Fenn's *The Persistence of Purgatory* (Cambridge University Press), and he is greatly impressed. He writes: "In its classic form purgatory was, first, an ordeal that transpired in the afterlife, a realm that shared the same 'time zone' as life on earth. Sins were measurable there in terms of time—each sin had units of time corresponding to it. Second, purgatory was a way of describing transactions between the living and the dead. The living had obligations to the dead to say prayers and make offerings on their behalf in order to ease their torments and to relieve them of time they had ahead of them in purgatory. Third, time was itself counting down to an end. At the end of time the soul had to be clean, purged of its accumulated sins by having suffered torments equal in weight to the evils it had imposed on others. This original 'purgatory complex' evolved as it aged. The realization that one could, through penance and avoiding sin, influence one's future condition in purgatory began to sink in, and the gravity of actions in this life become a more serious matter. This carried with it a sense that much had to be done before the day of one's death. Time began to feel scarce, deadlines came to matter, and people became anxious to have something to show for their time. A strong sense that time was running out came to preoccupy Western societies." With the Protestant Reformers, "purgatory began to dissolve into a more abbreviated scheme of salvation," and with the Enlightenment the afterlife appeared to disappear altogether. But this only intensified the sense of time: "Whatever atonement for sin that could be achieved and whatever salvation might be attained must occur entirely within the short span of this life. The modern self was thus conceived—the purification of the soul in purgatory was transformed into a quest for the self through education, discipline, and self-cultivation. In this way the ancient doctrine of purgatory persists in the modern reflexive self." Cobb says that Fenn would have the "purgatory complex" do the heavy lifting Max Weber had assigned to the Protestant work ethic, which turns out to be not so Protestant after all. The argument of *The Persistence of Purgatory* both fascinates and rings true. Within a few blocks of this office there must be at least a dozen gyms where you can see from the street all these people pushing, pummeling, punishing, and generally purging themselves. Don't they know what purgatory is for?

■ Brace yourself for some good news. It's time for the annual survey of the names baby boys and girls will bear through life, and the headline reads, "Parents Take a Turn Toward Tradition: Old Standards Are Making a Comeback in Children's Names." The story says, "Parents still want their children to stand out, if only through their names, but they are returning, perhaps, to the Bible and family roots for inspiration, rather than television and the mass media." Note the "perhaps." Girls still get the glitzier and more trivial names, but I'm glad to note that Tiffany is falling into disfavor. Destiny is big for black and Hispanic girls, and an academic expert suggests that is because poor people feel "buffeted by destiny," which strikes me as an instance of pc over-reading. The top names for black girls are, in order, Ashley, Brianna, Imani, Kayla, and Destiny. Imani is Arabic for faith, and for some reason blacks in the Northeast, but not in the rest of the country, are favoring Muslim names even when the parents are not Muslim. Malik is the seventh most popular for black boys. Across the board, Michael is coming on strong for boys, and, for nonwhite girls, Ashley seems to be a big winner. The top names for white boys are, in order, Michael, Joseph, Nicholas, Matthew, and Daniel. Again this year, Asians, for some inexplicable reason, have Kevin at the top of the list. If we really had investigative reporters, somebody would ferret out an elusive Irish-Asian connection here. While the rest of the commentariat is wrinkling its collective brow over what the Clinton Mess tells us about the character of the American people (not very much, in my opinion), I invite you to ponder the leading cultural indicator that is the giving of names. Would you believe that Emily is in the top five for whites and Asians? One of my best friends was an Emily. I feel like a boy again.

■ *We will be happy to send a sample issue of this journal to people you think are likely subscribers. Please send names and addresses to* FIRST THINGS, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010 (or e-mail to Ravaughan@aol.com). On the other hand, if they're ready to subscribe, call toll-free 1-800-783-4903.

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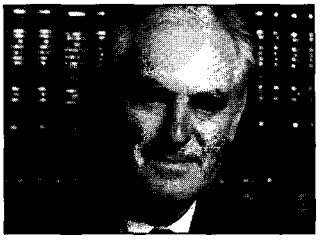

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